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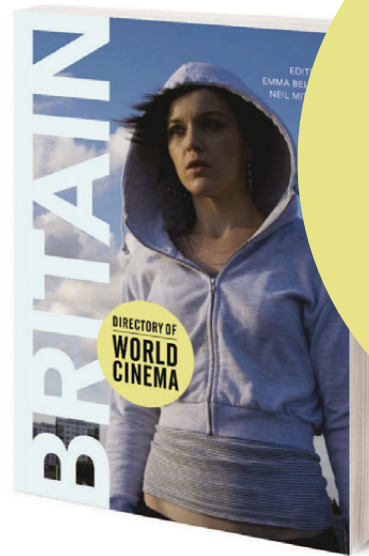
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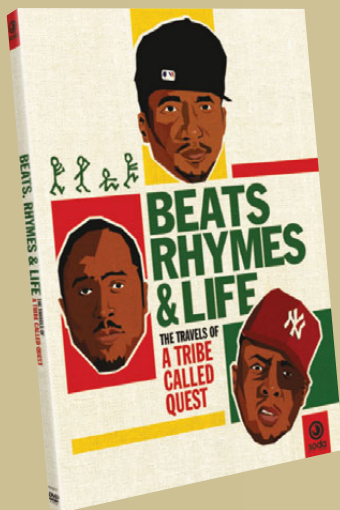
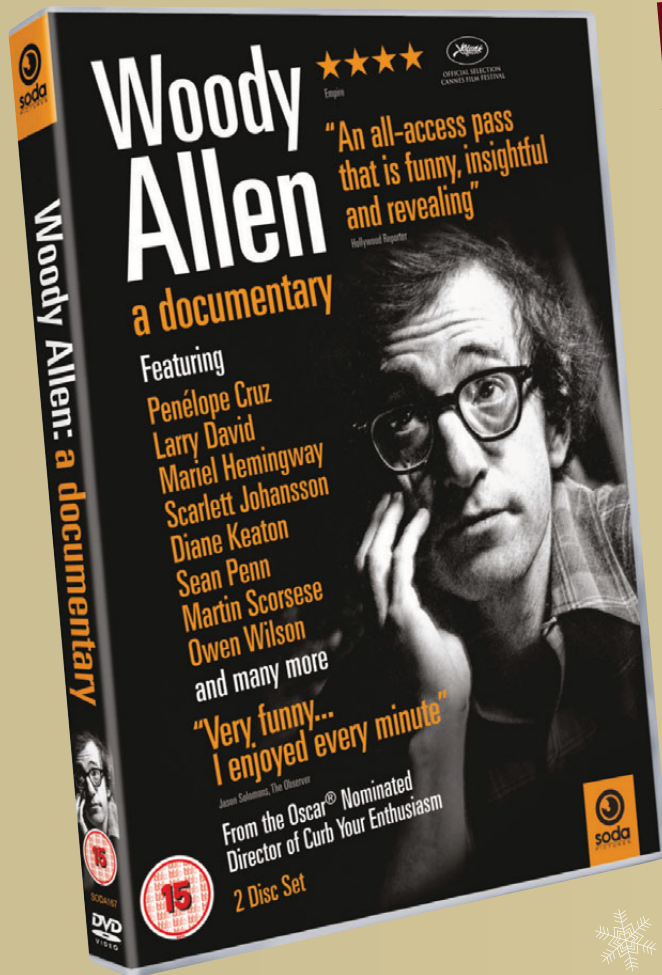
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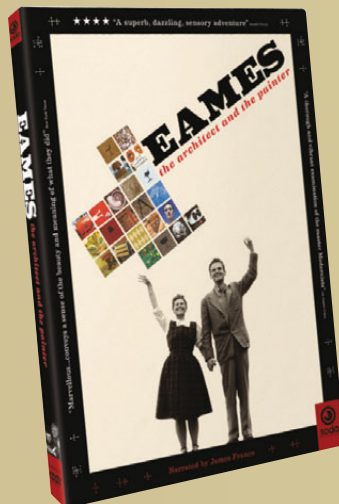
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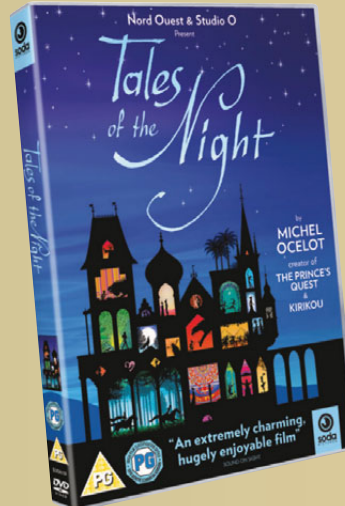
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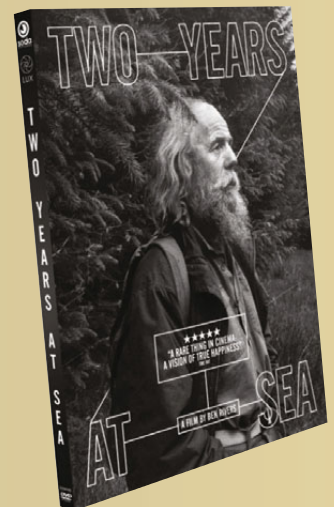
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January is always the Janus-faced edition where we look forward and back at the same time. So it's apt that there's so much in this issue about the moving image in transition. You may well have expected a still from *The Master* (above) to herald our Review of 2012 – yes, it's won our Films of the Year straw poll (see p.51 for the Top Ten) – but you may be less prepared for an issue that sets tributes to genius photographer/filmmaker William Klein (p.62) and prince of the underground Jonas Mekas (p.40) alongside celebration of the imagery in Ang Lee's CGI-fest *Life of Pi* (p.26).

Lee's dazzling visuals could only have been achieved with digital technology, but we also cover resistance to the demise of analogue film at Vienna and elsewhere (p.76). The issue's sub-theme, meanwhile, is forms of psychological disturbance – whether it's the sisterly blood feud in the revived *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (p.46), the dilemma of finding enough homicidal types in Martin McDonagh's *Seven Psychopaths* (p.34) or the strange powers of the drifter in Bruno Dumont's *Hors Satan* (p.32). Is this unpredictable behaviour? Just ask Joaquin Phoenix. **Nick James**

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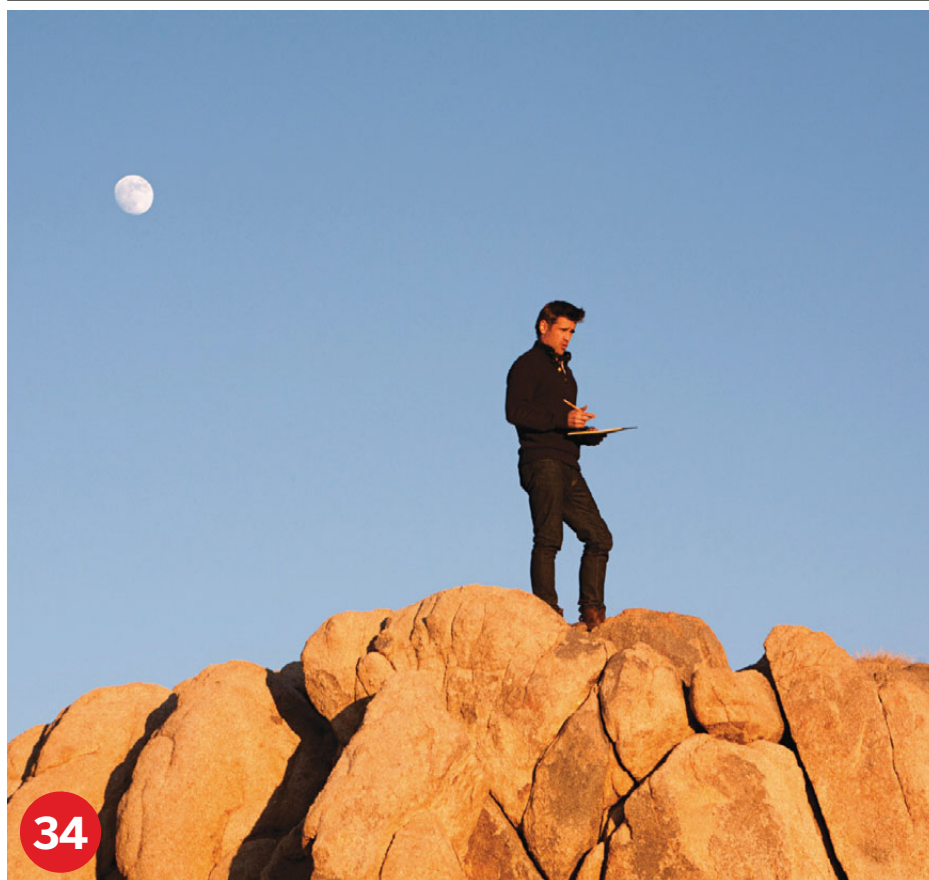


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34

Murder He Wrote

Nick James talks to London-Irish playwright-turned-director Martin McDonagh about *Seven Psychopaths*, his blackly comic follow-up to *In Bruges*, while **Ryan Gilbey** charts the unhappy fates of other screenwriter characters in the movies

FEATURES

26

COVER FEATURE: The Sea Inside

In bringing to the screen the magic realism of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, Ang Lee has set himself his most complex technical challenge yet, finds **Roger Clarke** PLUS visual-effects supervisor Bill Westenhofer and production designer David Gropman on how it was done

32

The Devil, Possibly

Bruno Dumont's sixth feature *Hors Satan* completes the director's quest to find the sacred in grim everyday reality. By **David Jenkins**

46



40

Jonas Mekas: Film as Life

The godfather of avant-garde film turns 90 this month. His life and work are celebrated by **Amy Taubin** plus **Chantal Akerman**, **Ken Jacobs**, **Jim Jarmusch** and **Peter Kubelka**

46

There Will Be Blood

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? is one of cinema's most challenging depictions of womanhood, says **Hannah McGill**

62

THE S&S INTERVIEW: William Klein

To coincide with a retrospective at Tate Modern, the Brooklyn-born filmmaker and photographer discusses his life and work with **Brian Dillon**

REGULARS

- 9 **Editorial** The big dumb movie umbrella
- 24 **Reader Offers**

Rushes

- 10 **Dan Callahan** finds hidden depths to Doris Day's wholesome persona
- 12 **Object Lesson: Hannah McGill** on diamonds, fashion and Molly Ringwald
- 14 **Dispatches: Mark Cousins** on the hidden treasures of Albanian cinema

The Industry

- 16 **Development Tale: Charles Gant** on how Dustin Hoffman came to direct *Quartet*
- 17 **The Numbers: Charles Gant** on *Skyfall*'s huge success at the UK box office
- 18 **How It Works: David Locke** on the UKFC's P&A Fund
- 21 **Profile: Geoffrey Macnab** talks to Amanda Berry, CEO of BAFTA

Festivals

- 22 **Nick Bradshaw** reports from CPH:DOX
- 23 **Lydia Papadimitriou** on a strong and defiant Thessaloniki festival

Wide Angle

- 66 **Kieron Corless** reports from the Viennale in its 50th-anniversary year
- 67 **Miguel Gomes** on the unjustly neglected cinema of Portuguese filmmaker Manuel Mozos
- 69 **Adrian Martin** rediscovers *Anna*, a 1970s Italian film rescued from the vaults
- 70 **Olaf Möller** examines the work of Argentina's Narcisa Hirsch
- 72 **Soundings: Frances Morgan** on East Africa's veejays and film 'explainers'
- 73 **Primal Screen: Pamela Hutchinson** explores the relationship between silent cinema and the internet
- 74 **Bradlands: Brad Stevens** wonders if Abel Ferrara is being punished for his absence of postmodern posturing
- 75 **Lost and Found: Neil Brand** on William Wellman's little-seen silent *Beggars of Life*

Forum

- 76 **Neil Young and Gabe Klinger** discuss whether there is a future for celluloid projection in the digital age
- 78 **Letters**

Endings

- 128 **David Evans** on *Days of Being Wild*

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TIME OUT

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UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

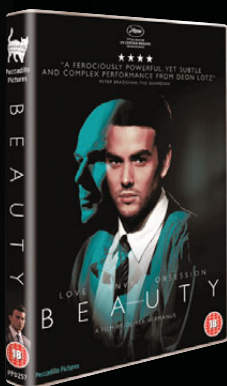
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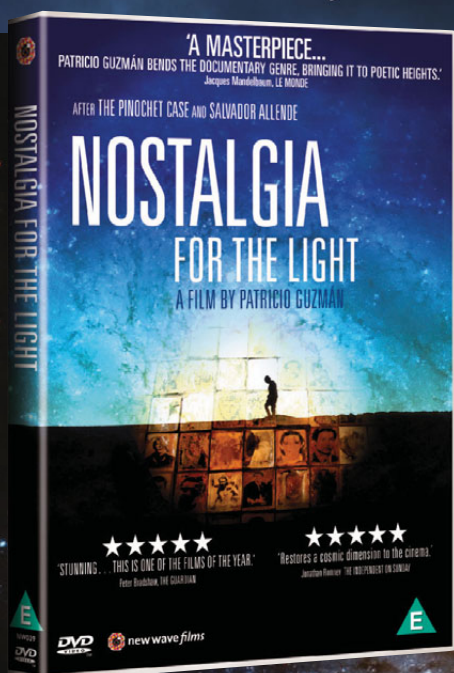
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COVER

'Life of Pi'
Retouched by DawkinsColour

NEXT ISSUE

on sale 8 January

Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

- 82 *Hors Satan*
- 84 *The Impossible*
- 86 *Life of Pi*
- 88 *West of Memphis*

FILMS

- 90 *Boxing Day*
- 90 *Celeste and Jesse Forever*
- 91 *Chakravayuh*
- 92 *Chasing Ice*
- 94 *Confessions of a Child of the Century*
- 94 *Dead Europe*
- 95 *Fun Size*
- 95 *Gambit*
- 96 *Here Comes the Boom*
- 96 *I, Anna*
- 97 *The Joy of Six*
- 98 *Life Just Is*
- 99 *Love Bite*
- 99 *Love Crime/Crime d'Amour*
- 100 *The Man with the Iron Fists*
- 101 *McCullin*
- 102 *Mental*
- 103 *Midnight's Children*
- 104 *Neil Young Journeys*
- 104 *The Oranges*
- 105 *Quartet*
- 106 *Rise of the Guardians*
- 106 *Safety Not Guaranteed*
- 107 *Seven Psychopaths*
- 108 *Silent Hill: Revelation*
- 109 *Smashed*
- 109 *Tinker Bell and the Secret of the Wings*
- 110 *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part II*
- 111 *When Santa Fell to Earth*
- 111 *You Will Be My Son*

HOME CINEMA

- 112 *Bonjour Tristesse, The Colditz Story*, Films by Victor Erice, *Floating Weeds, Gate of Hell*, Films by Kim Kiduk, *London on the Move: British Transport Collection Volume 10, Long Day's Journey into Night, Maitresse*, The Films of Marcel Pagnol, *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist, Southern Comfort*, Films by Jacques Tati, *This Is Cinerama, A Trip to the Moon*

DVD features

- 112 **Nick Pinkerton** revisits Fritz Lang's masterful early works
 - 115 **Pamela Hutchinson** examines the long shadow cast by *Battleship Potemkin* on the British documentary movement
 - 118 **Michael Atkinson** explores Japanese studio Shochiku's fleeting foray into pulp horror
- Television**
- 121 *The Human Jungle, Maison Close – Series 1, Parade's End*

BOOKS

- 122 **Philip Kemp** dips into a compendium of essays about Ealing Studios
- 123 **Ashley Clark** assesses a readable, if routine, study of Spike Lee
- 124 **Brad Stevens** admires an exhaustive overview of Donald Cammell's *Performance*
- 124 **Ian Christie** appraises a history of the rise of colour films in the UK



97



103



110



111

And online this month The complete Films of 2012 poll, plus the best DVDs and web videos of the year | Female film reporter competition | Kode9 on *La Jetée* and more bfi.org.uk/sightsound

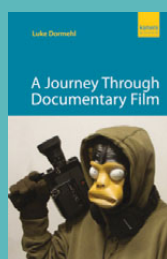
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Editorial Nick James



THE BIG DUMB MOVIE UMBRELLA

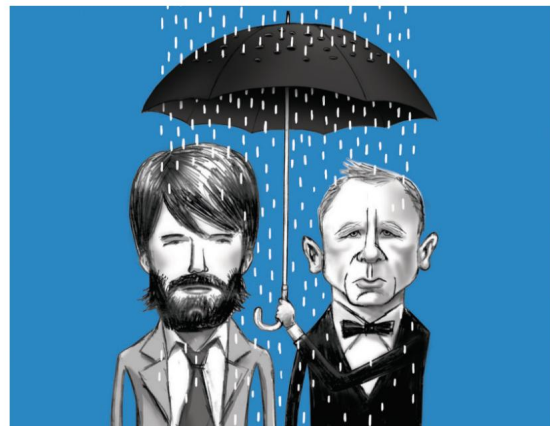
I recently watched a Spanish-subtitled print of *Argo* in the company of several Iranians. This took place at the splendid Morelia Film Festival in Mexico (on which I shall report next month), and there were good-humoured shrugs and pre-emptive wincing as we went in, knowing that the villains in the film – which concerns the remarkable getaway from revolutionary Tehran in 1980 of six escapees from the US embassy siege – would all be Iranians, and would therefore mostly be reduced to ciphers or stereotypes.

I sat next to Seifollah Samadian, the filmmaker and cinematographer who co-shot and co-starred in Abbas Kiarostami's documentary *ABC Africa*. Whenever characters in the film spoke Farsi (for which Spanish subtitles were provided), Seyfollah would kindly translate – lines such as when Sahar, the local girl employed at the Canadian embassy, asks her older colleague, “Why do these Canadians never go outside?” Later (plot spoiler), she risks her own life by telling the revolutionary guard that the ‘guests’ have been at the embassy for only two days when they’ve been there for weeks. I’m told that the English-language print doesn’t translate all the Farsi, so maybe I got more than I was meant to, though there wasn’t much I learned that didn’t seem obvious from the expression of the speakers.

As it happens, I had to leave the cinema in a hurry, regretting the missed chance to talk to my companions about the film. But the background embarrassment and mild shame of having enjoyed that screening – *Argo* is nothing if not a well-crafted thriller – was brought back to me by a Twitter tirade against the film’s attitude to Iranians from Mark Cousins (see <http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2012/11/15/mark-cousins-on-argo-iran-and-formulaic-thinking/>). It’s a fair-minded piece, convinced of how well-meaning Ben Affleck and his team were in making *Argo*, but equally certain that the film “chronically under-imagines or mis-imagines Iran” as a “chaotic place of jeopardy and inhospitality” – an impression completely at odds with the one Cousins has formed on his own visits to the country. What’s interesting is that my Iranian companions and I in Mexico expected nothing more from the film.

I’m not going to retread Cousins’s argument here, but I want to examine the usual defence against such attacks on Hollywood’s worldview. *Argo* has

Hollywood’s marketing and our own perception of Hollywood films tend to lump together films like ‘Argo’ and ‘Skyfall’ as forgivably ‘big dumb movies’



been described to me as a ‘big dumb movie’, to be enjoyed as that and nothing more. The Iranians in this context are nothing more than the moustachioed villains of a genre film, their portrayal not to be taken too seriously. Let’s park that thought for a moment while we consider another ‘big dumb movie’, *Skyfall*.

As a Bond movie, *Skyfall* is pitched firmly in the realms of cinema fantasy. It has no responsibility to do anything realistically. Nonetheless, its portrayal of one Bond girl prompted Giles Coren to write an admonitory piece for *The Times* which, he says, they didn’t want to publish, but which you can find online (<http://reciperifle.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/bond-villain.html> – Coren’s wife Esther Walker’s recipe site). It concerns the fate of Séverine, the gorgeous but scared sex worker whose elaborate backstory of abuse is laid out for Bond in a Macao casino before he visits her for sex – and not long afterwards is present when she’s killed for fun by the villain. Coren notes that Bond waits until after she’s killed before making his move to eliminate the baddies and shows no inclination to save her, but rather makes a joke about her death being a “waste of a good scotch” (a glass of which is balanced on her head).

While there is a connection between the two films in the sense of ‘bad’ foreigners being movie-disposable, I’m not saying *Argo* is guilty of the same kind of cynically exploitative emotional switcheroo from built sympathy to black humour. Most of the time Affleck’s film takes itself and its subject very seriously. It’s rather Hollywood’s marketing and our own perception of Hollywood films that tend to lump together films like *Argo* with *Skyfall* as forgivably ‘big dumb movies’. But I agree with Cousins that the liberal likes of *Argo* should do more (especially in the context of ongoing conflict in the Middle East) to portray accurately the people of the very nations whose diplomatic relations with the West are most fraught with real danger, even in thrillers. **S**

IN THE FRAME

SECRET APPEAL



A new BFI season provides an opportunity to reassess the surprisingly complex appeal of 1950s sensation Doris Day

By Dan Callahan

Talking about her career in the 1993 documentary *Doris Day: A Sentimental Journey*, Day cries, "If I can do it, you can do it. Anybody can!" Even at this late date, she was still hawking the same hard-sell ebullience that made her the number-one American female box-office star of the 1950s. But the very intensity of her positive thinking pointed clearly to its darker undercurrents.

Day's smile on screen was blindingly bright, but when she wasn't smiling that megawatt smile, her face often took on a discontented, suspicious look. Alfred Hitchcock didn't need to do much coaxing to get her to show us the depth of the confused neuroticism beneath that smile in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), her finest film performance. Her character in the Hitchcock film has given up her singing career to please her husband (James Stewart), and this sacrifice makes their marriage tense and edgy – a dynamic that explodes when Stewart medicates his wife right after he tells her that their son has been kidnapped. Day harrowingly catches this woman's panic and the indignity she feels at being treated like a child as she slips off into sleep.

Here is a movie star who clearly represents the conflict in her generation between female energy and the limits the society of that time tried to put on that energy. Audiences responded to the outward simplicity of her cheerful image, but her best directors utilised the somewhat hysterical emotional mess lying right underneath the surface of that image. It was the intensity of her emotion that made her one of the finest singers of her time, first with Les Brown and his orchestra and then in her film debut in Michael Curtiz's *It's Magic* (aka *Romance on the High Seas*, 1948), where she introduced the title song, soon to become a standard. Day's great trick as a singer is to hit a note as hard as possible and then pull away from it vocally as quickly as

Say cheese: the very intensity of Day's positive thinking pointed to its darker undercurrents

ON OUR
RADAR

Babette's Feast

Gabriel Axel's 1987 adaptation of Isak Dinesen's story stars Stéphane Audran (right) as the titular chef, who prepares a magical feast for her Danish employers. It's rereleased by the BFI from 14 December, playing at BFI Southbank and cinemas nationwide.



The Grandmasters

Wong Kar-Wai's martial-arts epic (right) about the legendary Ip Man – played in the film by Wong muse Tony Leung, who stars alongside his '2046' co-star Zhang Ziyi – has been so many years in the making that many wondered if it would ever see the light of day. But it is now finished, and set to hit cinemas in China on 18 December. A UK release should follow in 2013.





Whip-crack-away: 'Calamity Jane' showed Doris Day at her most androgynous

possible, so that it feels like she's roughly grabbing and then lightly caressing the lyrics – as if she's playing hard to get with them.

There was a sexy throb in her singing voice and in her husky speaking voice that was at odds with her wholesome, buttermilk blonde appearance, and this appealing tension between her looks and her voice is part of what made her a star overnight and kept her one, even when Warner Bros put her in a series of musical programmers. The most intriguing of these films is *Calamity Jane* (1953), where her androgyny was highlighted and then dropped for standard femininity by the end of the movie, so that she can sing the ballad 'Secret Love' in that bursting yet sensually evasive way of hers.

Her best musical and dramatic showcase was *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955), where she was pitted against James Cagney in several blistering confrontation scenes. Next to Cagney, Day suddenly seemed uncomfortably tall, bitter, very angry and irreparably wounded. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, she acted out a nightmare version of what her life might have been like if she'd stopped working, and so her third husband and manager Marty

Melcher made sure that she worked constantly (and anxiously), both on screen and in the recording studio. In her third major film of this time, Stanley Donen's *The Pajama Game* (1957), she worked hard playing a determined union organiser, belting out some of the best songs she was ever given to sing.

After that, Day had such a big hit as a touchy career woman in the comedy *Pillow Talk* (1959), with Rock Hudson, that she spent the rest of her career working increasingly strained variations on the formula of that film. She displayed an uninhibited talent for cartoon slapstick in Frank Tashlin's *The Glass Bottom Boat* (1966), but the commercial demands of her other comedies gradually coarsened her talent.

She has been retired for close to 40 years now, living in Carmel, California and doing work for animal rights, a seemingly forthright but actually somewhat mysterious and remote star who acted as a key transitional figure for women on screen before smiling hard and firmly shutting the door on us. ☹

i A Doris Day season plays at BFI Southbank, London until 29 December 2012

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE SEVEN PSYCHOPATHS

20% Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005)

20% Barton Fink (1991)

15% Adaptation (2002)

15% Reservoir Dogs (1992)

10% Sullivan's Travels (1941)

7% Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998)

5% Seven Samurai (1954)

4% Le Mépris (1963)

3% The Ladykillers (1955)

1% A Cock and Bull Story (2005)



Princefest

Check your wardrobe for anything purple, because the ICA is hosting a selection of films from 14 to 16 December starring His Royal Badness, including 'Purple Rain' and 'Graffiti Bridge'. The event features a talk by Matt Thorne, author of a recent Prince biography.



Andrei Tarkovsky

Taschen's 'Tarkovsky: Films, Stills, Polaroids & Writings', edited by the director's son Andrey, proves that even a single frame from the great man's films conveys great beauty and profundity. The book reproduces stunning images from his seven films, alongside polaroids revealing his photographer's eye.



Gremlins

Joe Dante's much-loved, wickedly witty 1984 monster movie (right) – about the dastardly creatures that are unleashed when the cute and cuddly Mogwai gets wet – is back in UK cinemas from 7 December.



BREAKFAST WITH TIFFANY'S

The diamonds Molly Ringwald wears in *The Breakfast Club* define her character as a spoilt daddy's girl – until she gives one away



By Hannah McGill

It can be a lonely business being fashion-forward, or so I'm told. When Molly Ringwald was cast as the wealthy, popular

high-school princess Claire in *The Breakfast Club* in 1985, director John Hughes wanted to emphasise her separation from her peers on the level of physical presentation. Costume designer Marilyn Vance clad the 17-year-old in head-to-toe Ralph Lauren, from the designer's store in Chicago.

Since the days when the 'Brat Pack' actors of *The Breakfast Club* roamed free, designer clothing has become a movie commonplace and – through mass advertising, outlet malls, diffusion lines and increased credit limits – entered the achievable aspirations if not the regular price range of many a first-world teenager. The hit US TV show *Gossip Girl* is as much an exercise in serving up lavish fashion plates as it is a drama; and the leading UK women's weekly *Grazia* struck a chord with its readers by opting to showcase high-end designer wear in its fashion spreads, rather than sensibly thrifty options. The first *Sex and the City* movie, in 2008, affirmed the personal potential of Carrie Bradshaw's personal assistant Louise, played by Jennifer Hudson, via her habit of renting designer handbags; she's finally rewarded when Carrie buys her one to keep. (The franchise's only significant black female character, Louise had been dropped by movie two, though the designer fetish amped up even more, with Carrie selling her wedding to *Vogue* magazine and becoming more besotted with her Vivienne Westwood wedding dress than with her tycoon fiancé.)

But when *The Breakfast Club* was made, designer labels still represented a rare level of luxury. Quite why Claire isn't tucked away at private school, given her family's wealth, isn't clear – but then Hughes takes every element of his little social melting-pot to an extreme, and *The Breakfast Club*'s endearing sincerity pretty much carries it over its improbabilities.

Defying the received wisdom that redheads shouldn't wear pink – and foreshadowing her next iconic role for Hughes as a very different breed of schoolgirl in 1986's *Pretty in Pink* – Ringwald rocks a blush-coloured short-sleeved blouse, a brown pencil skirt, knee-length brown leather boots and a substantial brown leather belt. It's not a sexy outfit, just a startlingly sophisticated one – and Claire, equipped with Ringwald's famous red hair and sullen pout, is a *jolie laide* malcontent rather than a sunny cheerleader type. "That's who Molly is," Vance later said, "a little more sad than she is adorable." Pulled into school on a Saturday for detention – Claire's is for cutting



Material girl: Molly Ringwald, right, with Ally Sheedy in John Hughes's *'The Breakfast Club'*

class to shop – *The Breakfast Club*'s troubled teens share confessions and hurl accusations; Claire breaks when Judd Nelson's Bender, the 'criminal' of the group, identifies her earrings as real diamonds. "Did you work for the money to buy those? Or did your daddy buy them?"

Paid for by daddy or, more commonly, by a suitor or suitors, diamonds stand as a persistent cinematic symbol not just of glamour, but of female dependency – and thus, paradoxically, also of independence. Most famously in Marilyn Monroe's 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' routine in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), and



Diamond stud: Claire's gift is an act of resistance

Madonna's 'Material Girl' pastiche thereof, diamonds represent the female capacity to protect against economic disempowerment using sexual influence, while not quite being a prostitute. ("Goodness, what beautiful diamonds," squeaks a hat-check girl in 1932's *Night After Night*; "Goodness had nothing to do with it, dearie," zings back Mae West.) A similar rebellious charge drove hip-hop artists to embrace the diamond as the ultimate in conspicuous consumption. Today, increased information regarding the ravaging effects of the diamond trade, as explored in Edward Zwick's *Blood Diamond* (2006), complicates that symbolism. The Hype Williams video (if not the confused lyrics) of Kanye West's 2005 track 'Diamonds from Sierra Leone' bluntly attacks the issue. West samples Shirley Bassey's theme song for the 1971 Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever*: "They won't," she asserts, "leave in the night." The insecurity at the heart of the desire for tiny hard-packed precious objects – strong markers of value in an uncertain existence – charges Claire's tirade at Bender, which makes every girl's dream sound like an ordeal: "Do you know how popular I am?" she spits. "Everyone loves me at this school." It's like the strange, stirring speech made by *The*



Paid for by daddy, diamonds stand as a persistent cinematic symbol not just of glamour, but of female dependency

Great Gatsby's golden girl Daisy: "Sophisticated? God, I'm sophisticated..." Despite *The Great Gatsby's* focus on the emptiness of privilege, the 1974 film was shamelessly sold on real luxury: jewels were by Cartier, and worth a rumoured \$5 million. Baz Luhrmann's upcoming version uses real Tiffany diamonds.

At the end of *The Breakfast Club*, Claire signals her newfound cross-class intimacy with Bender by placing one of her earrings into his leather-gloved hand. He puts it into his own pierced ear just before the film's triumphal freeze-frame ending. Like *The Graduate*, *The Breakfast Club* ends on a poignant ambiguity: will these kids really maintain their improbable bond come the renewal of social pressure on Monday morning? What this diamond signifies may well not be forever – but its impulsive exchange is a sweet gesture of resistance against the film's sad contention: "When you grow up, your heart dies." 🍷

KOBALCOLLECTION (4)

THE FIVE BEST... YASH CHOPRA FILMS

Yash Chopra (1932-2012) died in October. We select five of his best films from a directing career that spanned 24 films and 53 years



By Naman Ramachandran

As with all lists, this one is highly subjective. The directing career of Yash Chopra (left) can be broadly

divided into three categories: the early phase where he tackled social issues; the 1970s, when he exploited actor Amitabh Bachchan's 'angry young man' persona; and the phase he is most associated with – the blockbuster romance. Chopra also produced many films for other directors, across a variety of genres, overseeing some of Bollywood's biggest hits of all time.



2 'Deewar' ('The Wall', 1975)

Writers Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar deserve credit for the gritty film that had a simmering Amitabh Bachchan as a smuggler up against his upright policeman brother (Shashi Kapoor), his mother (Nirupa Roy) and God. Chopra imbues the love story of Bachchan and a prostitute (Parveen Babi) with pathos.



4 'Kaala Patthar' ('Black Stone', 1979)

Khan and Akhtar's masterly script melds Zola's *Germinal* and Conrad's *Lord Jim*. Bachchan plays a coalmine worker with a past, willing to face extreme danger. The face-offs between Bachchan and Shatrughan Sinha, as a petty criminal on the run, are among the many highlights of the film.



1 'Waqt' ('Time', 1965)

Chopra exploded onto the Hindi film scene with his third film, a big-budget multi-generational multi-starrer that popularised the siblings-separated-at-birth-and-reunited-in-adult-life theme first introduced in *Kismet* (1943). The massive success of the film made the theme song a staple of Hindi cinema.



3 'Kabhi Kabhie' ('Love Is Life' aka 'Sometimes', 1976)

Chopra's most romantic film sees former lovers meeting late in life and grappling with their emotions as their adult children fall in love. Khayyam's soundtrack remains evergreen and the film is notable for its lush, poetic visuals – something Chopra was becoming famous for.



5 'Lamhe' ('Moments', 1991)

The largely conservative Indian audiences of the early 1990s couldn't deal with a plot about a woman who falls in love with a man who used to be in love with her mother – let alone the fact that he might have reciprocal feelings for her. However, newly liberal India has since reassessed the film.

TERRA INCOGNITA

Before a recent visit to Albania, the country had barely imprinted itself on my thoughts. Only now do I realise what I've been missing



By Mark Cousins

I'm in Rome airport, on the way home after a week in a place I'd never been before. We mostly get to know places gradually. I

first saw America in the movies, for example, then went to New York in my twenties, then slowly got to grips with the United States as a real place. I first imagined France when I heard Peter Sarstedt's 'Where Do You Go To (My Lovely)' ('You live in a fancy apartment/Off the Boulevard St Michel'), then through Inspector Clouseau, then I went to Lourdes, then I saw François Truffaut films – a long and winding road to the country. But the place I've just been to, I didn't get to know gradually. I plunged in.

The place was Albania. Before this week I'd read one novel by Albanian Ismail Kadare; seen the movie *Tirana Year Zero*; got annoyed that *Taken 2*'s baddies are cardboard-cut-out Albanians; watched a documentary on communist dictator Enver Hoxha; and discovered, thanks to Christopher Hitchens, that Mother Teresa was Albanian. But beyond that, the country hadn't pressed itself on my thoughts. I vaguely recalled the anarchy in the 1990s when Albania's pyramid schemes failed and people lost their savings, and knew that the country had been very poor for decades; but the isolation that Hoxha engineered, through his Maoism, was so successful that I hadn't really been to Albania in my head. Hoxha was a master of the terra incognita. Ancient cartographers wrote on such parts of the map, "here be dragons."

As I sit here in Rome, not having shaved or slept, I realise that in the last week I've been in this land of dragons (there's a two-headed one on the Albanian flag) in four different guises: to teach a masterclass at the Marubi film school; as a film watcher, to be on the jury of the 13th Festival of Albanian Film; as an activist, because I'm involved with the Albanian Cinema Project, which works with the Albanian Film Archive to help create international awareness of the latter's collection and restorations; and as a wanderer, to walk the streets of Tirana, absorb as much as I can, and drink raki. Each would have been reason enough to visit the country. Together they made for one of the most intense weeks of my life.

The film school first. I was invited there by two passionate Albanian filmmaker sages, Iris Elezi and Thomas Logoreci, and went because I'd seen Gentian Koci's documentary *Not a Carwash*, which shows the school's staff and students defending it against attacks from the authorities. There's more than a hint of May '68 about this extraordinary film, as well as *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On*. I cried as I watched *Not a Carwash* because, amidst the



'Vertigo', Albanian-style: 'Pharmakon' is an Albanian movie that deserves international distribution

scuffles and shouting, the activists articulate the reasons why learning and film matter. They fight for their sacred space, and then we watch the school's outdoor screen being torn down. If you run a film school anywhere in the world, get a copy of *Not a Carwash* and screen it on the first day of term to new students. It'll show them why you exist and why they're there. The situation at Marubi, which is run by Kujtim Cashku, has improved since Koci's film was shot, but the film's Hegelian fracas – its fight for art – is universal.

To go to Marubi was a plunge, but my next role would immerse me even more. As a jury member of the Festival of Albanian Film, which is headed by filmmaker Artan Minarolli, I would see every Albanian fiction feature made in the last five years – a state-of-the-nation event. Fifteen films over four days turned out to be a crash course, a grand tour. In back-to-back, packed screenings, I saw a post-traumatic cinema of memories, borders and sexualities. Half the films were good or better

In back-to-back, packed festival screenings, I saw a post-traumatic cinema of memories, borders and sexualities

(could we say this about British or American films?). Johannes Naber's *The Albanian* had two elements that recurred across the films: border-crossing migrations, and the casting of a pretty young character who represents innocence, lack of compromise or ideological cleanness. Often this character is male and, as all the fiction directors were male, the result is a mild box-office homoeroticism. A third of the films were comedies (compared to none on a recent Russian jury I was on), *Dad's Army*-ish lampoons of totalitarian egotism and double-speak. The best of these was Saimir Kumburo's charming *Lenin and Us*, about an actor who used to play Lenin on film. Bujar Alimani's *Amnesty* flouted the trend for slightly theatrical acting with Luli Bitri's quietly beautiful performance of a wife visiting her husband in prison for sex.

I saw much to like but then, on my last day, I saw a new film, which is a first feature and a masterpiece. *Pharmakon*'s title refers to an Albanian scam where doctors profit from patients who buy drugs, but the film is more Roy Andersson than issue drama. The colour scheme is white-beige (director Joni Shanaj studied in Scandinavia). The first thing we see is the brutal slaughter of a donkey (and, later, an image of Robert Bresson's donkey film *Au hasard Balthazar*). Soon we're following a blond, woozy young man as he walks and watches



'Nentori i Dytë'



'Tomka and his Friends'

a girl. She's the dead spit of Kim Novak in *Vertigo* – and is filmed as if she is. The buildings in the film are like those in Antonioni's films, so *Pharmakon*'s cinephile credentials are intact. But it's the somnambulant melancholia that grips, the awkwardness of the couple's bodies, their hair, the way they speak to each other. The young man's father is a creepy presence throughout, but then he gives a speech about solitude that could have been written by Jean-Claude Carrière. One journalist asked me, "Why are Albanian films not as good as Romanian and Turkish films?" In the case of *Pharmakon*, they are.

My third role in the land of dragons was to see the film archive. Two summers ago, part of its cooling system failed, which led to temperature changes of considerable amplitude. The archivists there did all they could on limited resources, but the film prints – Albania's entire film history, plus many foreign films – began to smell of vinegar. I visited the archive, and filmed fungus growing almost a centimetre out from some of the walls. I've been in film archives around the world, but have witnessed nothing worse than this. Someone had the radical idea to re-use some of the old communist bunkers in the mountains as a safer place to store the films, so a delegation

of archivists, architects and film historians went there. I filmed this. Fingers crossed.

I'm no archivist, so I can't help with the immediate problems, but when I heard that the archive, Colorlab Film Corp and international partners – co-ordinated by the heroic American historian Regina Longo and Albanian Film Archive boss Elvira Diamanti – had just done Albania's first film restoration, I wanted to see it. The restored film, *Nentori I Dytë*, played on the opening night of the festival. It's a very national story of Albania's fight for independence – their *Braveheart*, if you like. Technically, the restoration is world-class, revelatory, turning a murky film into one of rainbow colours and inviting landscapes. The restored version will play as a fundraiser for the Albanian Cinema Project, in Detroit and elsewhere.

Also in the archive are the films of the great director Xhanfize Keko. She's not mentioned in Annette Kuhn's usually reliable *The Woman's Companion to International Film*, yet in Tirana a main street is named after her. I went to a market, bought DVDs of some of her 25 films; having watched them (unsubtitled), I can see why she's so famous in Albania. Xhanfize Keko is a great director. Her *Tomka and his Friends* was made in 1977, after Albania's fall-out with China (Hoxha was angry that China

had welcomed Nixon). It's about kids, like many of her films, and is fresher than *Bicycle Thieves*. Set during World War II, it follows a bunch of boys whose football field is stolen by the Nazis. The film has a documentary naturalism, and yet the academy framing is beautiful and the *mise en scène* masterful.

Tomka and his Friends is reminiscent of *Emil and the Detectives*. The faces of its kids are why I'm part of the Albanian Cinema Project. There are treasures in this archive that need rescuing and sharing. The DVD of *Tomka and His Friends* is actually in quite good nick, so what has stopped us from seeing it for more than 40 years? Hoxha's siege mentality, of course, but also its lack of subtitles, and foreigners' lack of real interest in this terra incognita.

My happiest, most intoxicated experience of Albania was walking in Tirana's streets. On my first morning, I wandered to the massive concrete pyramid in the centre of the city which Hoxha intended as his mausoleum. It's covered in graffiti now and, just as Bernardo Bertolucci says that Los Angeles is the Big Nipple, so this beautiful, toxic temple is like a big Albanian nipple. I wondered how to film this amazing place, then noticed that wild flowers have seeded themselves on it. Their roots will eventually make the pyramid a ruin. I think of Saint-Just's line: "The present order is the disorder of the future." And so I film not the building but the wild flowers. The centrality of this building, its architectural modernity and ideological disgrace mean that young people have made it their own. They get high on it.

I ask director Gentian Koci if he thinks that people have ever had sex up there. "Of course," he says.

After being in Albania, what little I previously knew about the place seems foreign to me – receding, like the day.

i For more information, visit www.thealbaniancinemaproject.org



Buried: old bunkers could be used to store films



Flower power: the Hoxha pyramid

QUOTE OF THE MONTH DAVID LEAN

"When the great actor says the line, you can put scissors precisely at the point A and it's wonderful. When the star says the line, you can hold for four frames longer because something else happens..."

The new 4K digital restoration of Lean's *'Lawrence of Arabia' (1962)* is out now in UK cinemas, released to mark the film's 50th anniversary



DEVELOPMENT TALE

SINGING FOR THE CINEMA



Three of a kind: director Dustin Hoffman, standing, talks to Maggie Smith and Tom Courtenay on the set of 'Quartet', about a home for retired opera singers

Despite an illustrious British cast and an Oscar-winning screenwriter, *Quartet's* journey to the screen was far from easy

By Charles Gant

Following the massive success of *The King's Speech* and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, you might think that *Quartet*, one of several new films targeting the mature audience, would have found an easy path to the screen. But the adaptation of the Ronald Harwood stage play, starring Maggie Smith and Tom Courtenay as residents at a care home for retired opera singers, began its journey long before the grey pound became the latest hot film market.

The project started around six years ago, when Courtenay suggested to Harwood that he do *Quartet* as a film, with himself, Smith and Albert Finney in the lead roles. Initially it was smooth sailing, with producer Mark Shivas (*A Private Function*) quickly securing development funding from BBC Films for the writer to work on an adaptation. It probably didn't hurt that Harwood had won an Oscar for *The Pianist* in 2003. After Shivas died in 2008, Stewart Mackinnon, his producer partner at

production company Headline, continued at the helm, and a package with director Richard Loncraine (*Richard III*) and the three actors was announced at Cannes in May 2009.

It was around this time that producer Finola Dwyer, whose *An Education* had premiered at Sundance earlier that year, was brought in to beef up the production side. Perhaps conveniently, Loncraine departed the project in June, taking over the reins of Peter Morgan's HBO film *A Special Relationship*. Now Dwyer and sales company HanWay had the opportunity to present the film to the market again in refreshed form, but first they needed to find a new director.

Dwyer picks up the story: "Distributors and financiers always have stock responses and sweeping statements. The older audience – 'Oh, they only go to the cinema on Wednesday afternoon, they're too scared to go out at night.' Completely not true. We had the same with *An Education*. 'Oh, it's near period, nobody goes to the cinema to see it.' There are always 100 reasons why something shouldn't happen."

Aside from resistance to films featuring older characters, Dwyer faced challenges on the budget: "I felt that we would need a good £5 million because all our cast were going to be in their seventies and eighties, so it was not

something we were going to be able to shoot quickly. And it's quite a big cast as well, 40-odd people. You couldn't shoot six-day weeks on it. It was going to be like working with children and animals. And also you needed to bring a bit of scale and cinema to it. I wanted to be very ambitious for it. We met a few directors, working with the BBC and Headline, trying to find someone I really thought I'd be able to raise the finance off, and the cast would stay with.

"I was sitting at my desk," she continues, "looking at the directors list and thinking, 'There's someone I'm not thinking of... somebody who could just bring the right amount of energy, life, humour, pathos to this material, and make it sing for the cinema.' I saw I had a missed call from [director of photography] John de Borman, who I did *An Education* with. I listened to his message, and he had had this call from Dustin [Hoffman]. John had done *Last Chance Harvey* with him. I would never have thought of Dustin, I'm sure. He said that Dustin had called to say how he had watched *An Education* over the holidays and loved it, and that he would love to spend more time in London. Something to act in, or direct. I thought, 'Maybe *Quartet*.' It's about being in your last act of life, it's an actors' piece, set in one house. This could be the perfect debut for him!

He was 72 then, just turned 75 now. It could really play into so many things that would just make it make sense for him. That was Friday night, and by Sunday John was ringing saying Dustin had read it twice. He'd been on a flight with his wife, and he'd been crying on the plane.

"A lot of people thought, 'Wow, that's a really wild idea,' because Dustin does have a certain reputation – apart from being a brilliant actor – as someone who can be quite challenging to work with. And he's never directed anything – and there's probably a reason... People said, 'You should read this' or 'you should talk to that person', but I had a good instinct about it. I thought, 'I don't need to read lots of stories about him.' I did ask him in our first meeting about his reputation and he was very honest. I always think there are at least two sides to every story." But even with Hoffman attached, it wasn't an easy sell. "No

Distributors and financiers always have stock responses. There are always 100 reasons why something shouldn't happen

one was jumping on the UK side," says Dwyer. "A lot of people were excited by the idea of Dustin, but it was also a bit of a roll of the dice."

Meanwhile Hoffman divided his time between a major acting commitment on the HBO series *Luck* and further script development with Harwood. "Dustin brought a lot of texture and small things to the script," says Dwyer. "Seemingly small, but actually they all added great subtleties and layers to the piece. He said, 'We need to have visitors to this home.' He wanted that cycle of life to be represented in the film. He wanted the place to capture the energy and spirit of the home. He wanted the residents to be celebrated and cherished and loved by the workers."

With Hoffman's commitment to *Luck* extending into 2011, the shoot start date drifted. But the delays proved helpful to financing: following the success of *The King's Speech* in spring that year, its UK distributor Momentum signed on for *Quartet* in April, and Dwyer was able to finance the film without a US distributor in place. "I wanted to put the financing together so Dustin would have room to breathe and not have financiers crowding around," she explains. US rights were assigned to The Weinstein Company late in post-production.

In the end, Finney didn't feel able to commit to such a major role, and was replaced by Billy Connolly. For the supporting cast, Hoffman had a bold idea that added to the risk, but also the reward. "Dustin very much wanted real retired opera singers and musicians to play the other residents," says Dwyer. "I remember thinking opera singers aren't necessarily the best actors in the world. But Dustin was very confident that he could get a good performance out of anyone. And I was like, 'OK, you're the director.' I think it adds a whole dimension to the film." 

 **'Quartet' is released in the UK on 1 January, and is reviewed on page 105**

THE NUMBERS THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

By Charles Gant

Mapping out the year's cinema releases is a strange amalgam of science and guesswork, in which distributors and exhibitors jostle and collaborate to try to ensure there is always a mix of films from varied genres targeting audiences: male and female, younger and older, mainstream and niche. Outcomes, however, are never wholly predictable.

As we go to press, *'Skyfall'* (£82.8 million and counting) looks set to overtake *'Avatar'* (£94 million) to become the biggest film ever at the UK box office, and may be the first to crack £100 million here. But while it's clearly an outlier in cash terms, what's more unusual about *'Skyfall'* is its penetration of all demographics, connecting not just with fans of action spectacle but with cinemagoers who may last have visited the cinema to see *'The King's Speech'*. We've seen blockbusters play to arthouse audiences with the Jason Bourne franchise and films by Christopher Nolan, but *'Skyfall'* has dominated the cinema conversation to an unprecedented degree. "It happens rarely," says Clare Binns, chief booker for arthouse chain Picturehouse. "In this case, it's just been like a tsunami. It's completely engulfed everything."

Binns had made projections about the film's playability based on the performance of the well-reviewed *'Casino Royale'* and the less-admired *'Quantum of Solace'*, but then, with less than three weeks to go to release, Sony revealed *'Skyfall'* to exhibitors. "I was completely gobsmacked by how good it was, and how intelligent," says Binns. "As soon as we saw it, I could see how we were going to have problems." Films that would have been expected to occupy the biggest screens at Binns's cinemas, arriving three or four weeks into the Bond film's run, might now have to settle for second best. Over at rival arthouse the Curzon Mayfair, for example, *'The Master'* and *'Skyfall'* have shared the showtimes at both the bigger and smaller screen.



Overpowering: Daniel Craig in *'Skyfall'*

For more mainstream titles, the challenge has not been screen availability so much as audience attention. Says Binns, "I just think Bond has been mopping up audiences that would have gone to see other films in a normal period. *'The Sapphires'* is the kind of film we try and give our audiences the opportunity to see, but it died a death, and *'Argo'* is not as robust as I would have expected."

For Curzon's chief booker Jason Wood, Sam Mendes's "arthouse background and auteur credentials" played a factor in making *'Skyfall'* a defensible choice for blockbuster-shy audiences. "The broadsheet press, with serious consideration of the film not just as an economic or commercial entity, but as a cultural entity, conferred cultural cachet," he adds. "Everything conspired to make audiences feel it was OK to go along." 

UK BOX OFFICE, SELECTED RELEASES FROM 26 OCTOBER 2012

Film	UK release date	Gross*
Skyfall	26 October	£82,836,559
Argo	7 November	£2,828,888
Rust and Bone	2 November	£706,671
The Sapphires	7 November	£579,570
The Master	2 November	£553,521
The Shining	2 November	£188,069
Love Bite	9 November	£124,376
Amour	16 November	£115,700
My Brother the Devil	9 November	£49,549
Keep the Lights On	2 November	£38,146
Elena	26 October	£36,476

*grosses to 18 November only

ACCESS ALL AREAS?



Money on tap: 'Submarine' benefited from funding designed to help create a more diverse film culture

Recent attempts to find new audiences for arthouse films across the country have proved well-meaning failures

By David Locke

The legacy of the UK Film Council's twin P&A (prints & advertising) Fund and Digital Screen Network (DSN) strategies has not been a happy one. It prompts the question: just how did well-meaning executives get it so wrong? The DSN's stated aim was to facilitate the flexible programming of more specialist film around the UK, but it proved a thwarted ambition, as cinemas mostly used the new screens to programme mainstream titles far wider. The big studios were happy, however, as they benefited from a massive reduction in 35mm print costs. Meanwhile independent distributors still struggled to secure bookings.

The P&A Fund was supposed to counter the studios' huge marketing resources in favour of the independent distributor, and thus contribute to a more diverse film culture – 'access' was the buzzword. But films deemed eligible for funding were largely selected for their ability to cross over from the arthouse to more mainstream audiences. Titles such as *The Lives of Others* and *Submarine* (to name but two) were awarded a sizeable amount of money from the fund on the proviso that their respective distributors would release them on more screens than they would have done without this financial aid, and contribute matching funding.

In the case of, say, a high-profile foreign-language title, 50 screens would be the rough number required to trigger funding. But the reality is that there simply aren't 50 screens in the UK capable of sustaining such a title. If

Simply dumping a film into a regional multiplex screen without any outreach work hasn't done anyone any favours

there were, the distributor would secure these screens as a matter of course. Films such as *Curse of the Golden Flower*, *The Sea Inside*, *The Skin I Live In* and *Nightwatch* were all awarded large amounts of funding (£300k, £100k, £250k and £200k, respectively), yet all were handled by sizeable companies that could easily have released them on 50 screens had they wished to.

Of these 50 screens, a number would be experiments – an attempt to push the film to audiences who know little about such cinema, or would perhaps want it if it had strong word of mouth. Delivering minimal returns, the film usually wouldn't make it to a second week, causing frustration for distributor, exhibitor and funding organisation. The introduction of virtual print fees by many arthouses and multiplexes, requiring the distributor to more or less to pay for the privilege of having its film shown, meant the distributor might not see any return at all from the seven days. Once distributors, exhibitors and indeed audiences have experienced one such failure, what's the incentive to take the same risk with another comparable title?

The continuing emphasis on 'access' means that 'niche' films are still expected to open on more screens than they can sustain. Of course, potential new audiences are there, but they need a bit of handholding and education. Simply dumping a film into a regional multiplex screen without any outreach work and hoping that the extra marketing will work hasn't done anyone any favours.

Despite some baffling decisions (£29k to *Tortoise in Love*) and questionable over-commitment to British titles, including *Ill Manors* (£280k), *Fast Girls* (£297k) and *Pusher* (£185k), the outlook is not entirely bleak. Many films have benefited from P&A funding: *Control* (£173k), *Fish Tank* (£70k), *This Is England* (£90k) and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (£199k). Now that the UKFC has been subsumed by the BFI, there's a renewed sense of optimism. In future there is expected to be more flexibility with regard to minimum-screen count – in which case true audience development outside London can begin in earnest. ☺

IN PRODUCTION

● **Clio Barnard** has recently finished principal photography on 'The Selfish Giant', her second feature and follow-up to the widely acclaimed 'The Arbor'. Inspired by Oscar Wilde's story of the same name, 'The Selfish Giant' is described as a "contemporary fable" about two teenage boys who fall in with a scrap-metal merchant, forming a good team until tragedy strikes. Barnard says the story was inspired by people she met while making 'The Arbor'.

● **Serge Bozon**, French director of the acclaimed 'La France' and 'Mods', has completed shooting on 'Tip Top', a comedy starring Isabelle Huppert and Sandrine Kiberlain as police officers sent to a provincial police station to investigate a possible case of corruption.

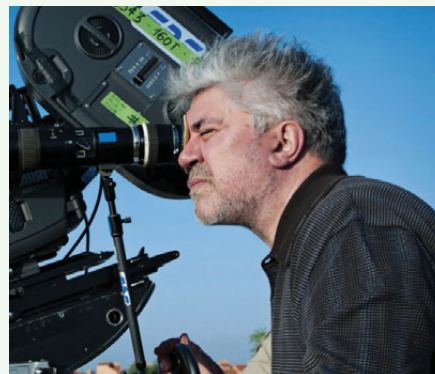
● **Lukas Moodysson** is currently shooting his seventh feature 'We Are Best!', an adaptation of his wife Coco Moodysson's graphic novel 'Never Goodnight'. The story follows three neglected 13-year-old girls who roam the streets of Stockholm before deciding to start a punk band, despite all their friends telling them that punk is dead. The film is due for an autumn 2013 release.

● **Bruce Springsteen** is the subject of a new documentary being produced by Ridley Scott Associates, who were behind the 'Life in a Day' project. As with that film, the producers of 'Springsteen & I' are sourcing fan footage of the Boss, or of people with stories of what Springsteen's music means to them, which they will edit together to form the feature.

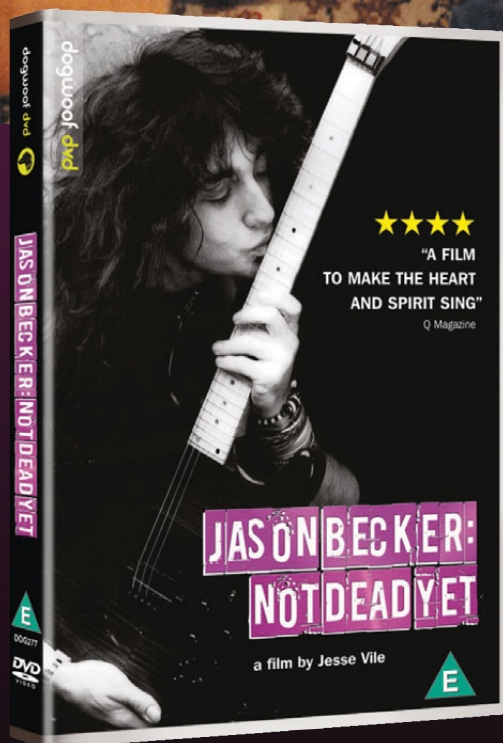
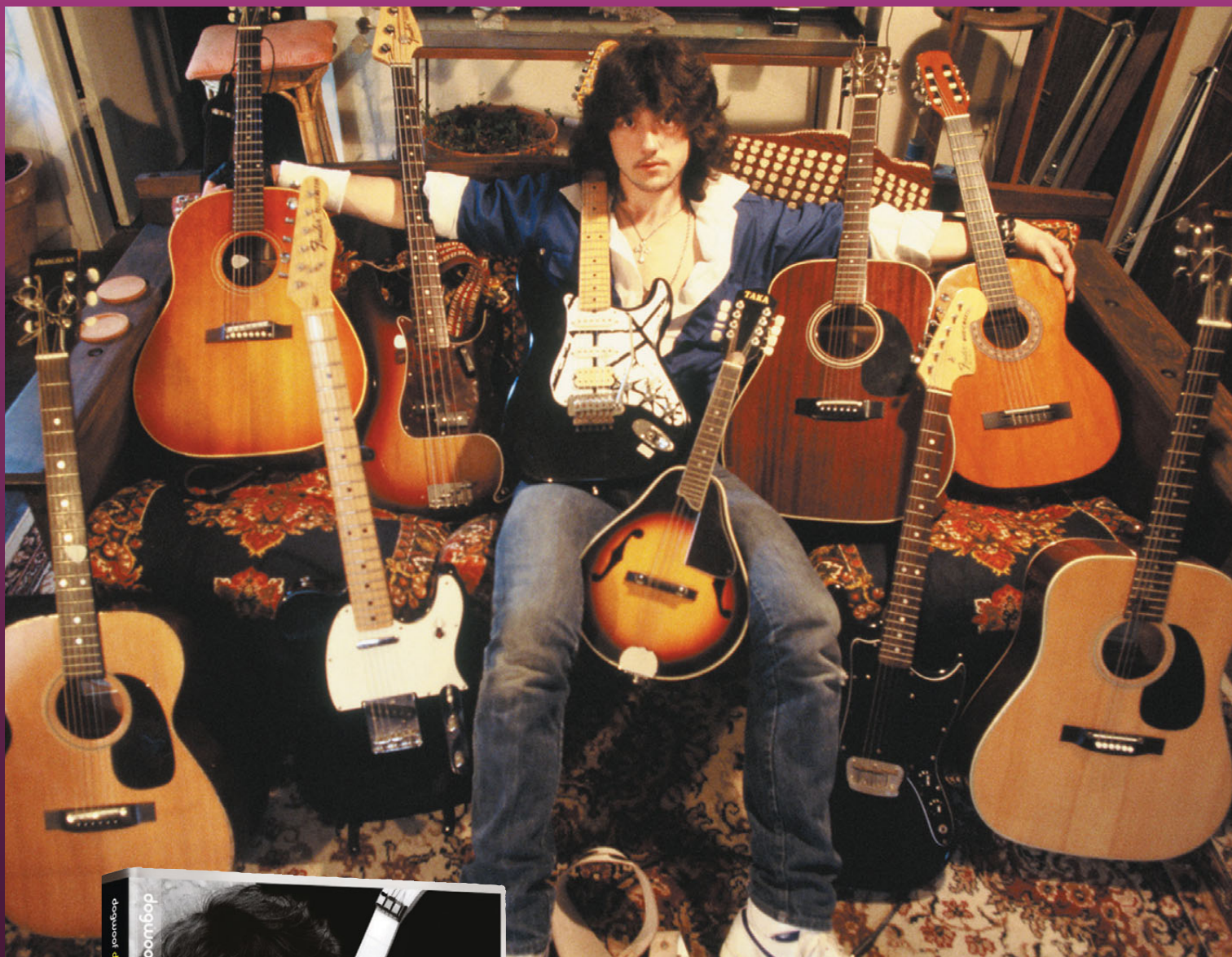
● **David Cronenberg** is to follow 'Cosmopolis' with 'Maps to the Stars', which reportedly tells the story of two child actors caught up in Hollywood's darker side.

The film is set to star Robert Pattinson, Rachel Weisz and Viggo Mortensen.

● **Bille August** is set to adapt Vladimir Nabokov's 1932 novel 'Laughter in the Dark', a story adapted once before by Tony Richardson in 1969, when it starred Anna Karina.



● **Pedro Almodóvar** (above) has said that one day he hopes to make a sci-fi movie. Speaking at an event at London's BAFTA, the Spanish director talked of his love of 1950s films such as 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers'. "I am still young enough to make a science-fiction movie," he said. "I have ideas for this genre. The way I would like to do it is present something impossible in a real, domestic way. One of the scripts on my desk is of that genre, so I hope to make that."



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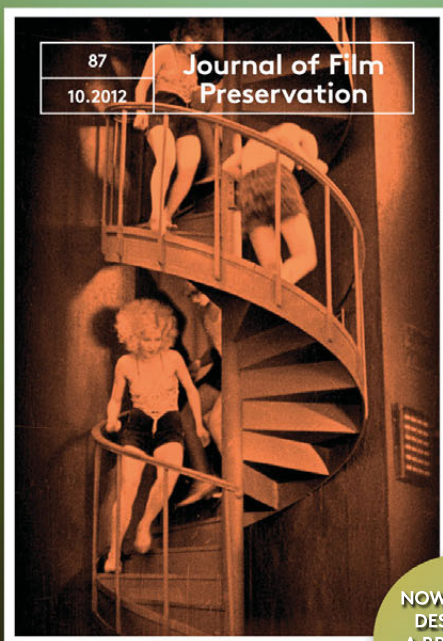
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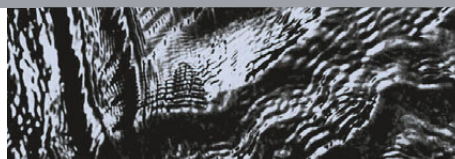
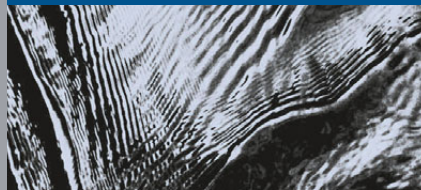
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AMANDA BERRY

Over 14 years, the chief executive of BAFTA has revitalised the organisation, turning its awards ceremony into a global success

By Geoffrey Macnab

Amanda Berry OBE, chief executive of BAFTA, is one of the best-connected figures in the British film industry, with a 'little black book' full of contacts ranging from Hollywood studio bosses to British royalty. She joined BAFTA in 1998, rising to chief exec two years later. In her 14 years at the helm, the Orange British Academy Film Awards have been transformed from an event the British public hardly noticed into arguably the most prominent awards show outside the Oscars. Foaming red carpets and other minor mishaps apart, the event has run very smoothly in recent years, and at the time of her interview with *S&S*, the BAFTA boss was preparing for a new awards season that promises to be just as hectic as its predecessors.

Berry's decision in 2001 to move the film awards away from their traditional April date to a February slot, in advance of the Oscars, played a crucial part in the event's metamorphosis. "What had happened was that the film and TV awards used to be together," she recalls. "It was one ceremony. You'd have wonderful scenarios where you would have John Travolta sitting in the audience next to *EastEnders* [cast members]. *EastEnders* knew exactly who he was and he didn't know who they were!"

The old April slot did the awards no favours. It meant that the Baftas came at the very end of awards season, after the US Academy Awards, when the public's interest had already long since ebbed away. In February, by contrast, the Baftas are in the middle of the action. The event is now shown by broadcasters all around the world, and given a prime-time slot by the BBC. "When you look at the Oscars, [which] spend \$40 million, we deliver way above our budget," Berry notes.

Interviewed in her house in south-east London, Berry explains the unlikely career path that brought her to BAFTA. Born in Darlington in 1961, she grew up in North Yorkshire. "My dad was a dry cleaner and my mother was a hotelier, so I had no background in this business whatsoever," she says. A sickly child who suffered from asthma and allergies, she fell in love with film because she was often at home watching movies on TV.

Berry took her first steps towards a media career when she enrolled in a business-studies and graphic-design course at Newcastle Polytechnic. "Each year, you had to go on an industrial placement," she recalls. "The first year, I went to the *Evening Chronicle* in Newcastle, to their promotions department. They loved me. I had bright blue hair. I was a bit of a punk. They let me do whatever I wanted to do."

Her next work placement was at Thames Television. She was supposed to stay for six weeks, but stayed six months, working on promotions and PR. Eventually Berry landed a job at a small theatrical agency, Duncan Heath Associates. Within a year, the agency



Amanda Berry: 'I don't think you can ever stop wanting to improve, to tweak and just examine things'

became part of International Creative Management (ICM). At the age of 23, she was a director, looking after the interests of clients from Christopher Lee to Paul McCartney.

"I stayed for six years, but I felt I had done my time," is how she explains her decision to move into TV producing. After successful stints at LWT and STV, she took a pay cut to become BAFTA's head of development and events. Two years later she was appointed chief exec and set about revitalising the organisation. At that point BAFTA – founded in 1947 – had an overdraft and limited resources. Its membership was "incredibly loyal", but there was a lack of younger blood. "I went in with a huge dose of aspiration, saying: 'Come on, we can do this.' I started increasing the number of corporate partners we worked with. If you're working with the right partners, you enhance your brand."

Berry is keen to explain why (as she puts it) the film awards "aren't just about British film" – it's because the event is aimed at an international audience. "What we do is shine a very bright spotlight on film generally," she says, "but with a particular emphasis on British film because we are coming from the UK."

To sceptics, the Baftas can risk appearing an exercise in film-industry backslapping and celebrity vanity. But Berry points to the event's importance both to the British industry and to BAFTA itself. Staged at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden for around £1 million, the event is an important marketing tool for UK distributors. It also generates the profits that enable BAFTA to pursue its other activities.

"It [the film awards] is a very important part of our income, which is around the £10 million level," she points out. "That is split in

broad brushstrokes between our building at 195 Piccadilly, which we rent out for corporate hire, our membership fees, and partnerships and sponsorships around the awards."

The film awards are what BAFTA is best known for, but it also stages 250 other events every year. These include everything from debates about sexism in the media and hospice screenings at Christmas to last year's promotion in LA for which 42 "young Brits to watch" across film, TV and videogames were invited to Hollywood to meet the big names in their industries. Berry is also proud of the success of the BAFTA "kids' vote" and its Children's Awards, which take place in late November. The idea here is to engage with children at an early age and make sure they know what BAFTA is.

As for the main film awards, Berry makes sure that the 6,500 or so adult members take their voting duties very seriously. There are two rounds of voting this year (down from three in previous years). "Voting is compulsory – it means you have to engage with the process," she insists. "You either have to vote or abstain." Berry encourages members to come clean. For example, if they don't feel they have the expertise to express a preference in categories like visual effects, or haven't seen all the films in another category, they should abstain.

To qualify, films need to be released by the Friday before the ceremony. "In the early days of moving before the Oscars, we used to allow films that opened right up until April to qualify," Berry notes. "The difficulty with that is that it meant the ceremony involved films the public didn't know. Since we changed that, generally our ratings have been going up." In spite of the success BAFTA has enjoyed, Berry is continuing to rethink and reshape the organisation and its awards. "The year that I say about the Film Awards 'That was perfect' is the year I should leave," she concludes. "I don't think you can ever stop wanting to improve, to tweak and just to examine things." ☺



The 2013 Orange British Academy Film Awards take place on 10 February

The film and TV awards used to be together. You'd have John Travolta sitting in the audience next to EastEnders

CPH: DOX

REALITY CHECK



The jaws of death: an abandoned fish-shaped restaurant in 'The Act of Killing'

Copenhagen's documentary festival showed filmmakers grappling with the mess we've made of the world

By Nick Bradshaw

Copenhagen's CPH:DOX signed off its tenth edition with the announcement that admissions had topped the 50,000 mark, continuing a pattern of steady rises from the 11,000 who visited its inaugural event, and making it now the second-biggest documentary festival in Europe, after Amsterdam's IDFA. Specialising in creative crossovers and innovative reality/fiction melds, the festival is also clearly riding high on the rude health of Danish documentary-making (which accounted for half of the ten top-attended movies, and the same proportion of my own viewing card), not to mention the coup this year of showcasing one of the most startlingly creative legal depositions you're likely to see. Indeed, there was a strong sense that what was charging filmmakers here was the very urgent mess we've made of a world whose governing economic and political 'reality' is something of a failing fiction, and whose routine images need thorough overhaul. Across experiments in re-enactment, experiential *vérité*, travelogue

essays and contemplative road movies, the themes ran the gamut from mass murder to global migration, destruction and our trouble as a species in getting along and loving one other. I don't think it was just the way I picked them.

The most parochial of the films was Max Kestner's *I Am Fiction*, a gothically bizarre video diary whose unreliable maker ("At the moment my name's Thomas van Brunt") sues – most un-Danish, I'm told – his former creative co-conspirator Claus Beck-Nielsen for flagrant and repeated instances of artistic identity theft in his books and plays. Blackly comic, it unfolds as both a single chapter of a curious local saga and a superheroic tussle between rival artistic powers to redefine reality. "The whole point of this is that reality is merely an offset," Nielsen tells the judge. It was striking to find that this bird-like enigma had been sat watching the film with us; I watched him disappear off down the street alone.

Likewise modestly resonant, James N. Kienitz Wilkins's *Public Hearing* takes the transcript of a soundings exercise into the planned expansion of a Wal-Mart in upstate New York as the script for a semi-parodic articulation of local democracy, shot entirely in black-and-white 16mm close-ups with little ambient sound. Wilkins introduced the screening on 7 November, glad to have woken up with the same US president as the day before: "That

sort of repetition, where the difference is in the details, is what this movie is all about."

So far, so niche. But there was one movie that took the tropes of re-enactment and self-representation to a new level of horrific revelation. Tom Charity has already reported on *The Act of Killing* from Toronto (*S&S*, November), but it'll be worth many revisits. Joshua Oppenheimer's film records a handful of Indonesian genocidal killers as they shoot their own movie diligently detailing how they slew their way through well over a million alleged

'Searching for Bill' makes a partly staged road journey from trailer-park Louisiana to California's Slab City



'Searching for Bill'

communists and ethnic Chinese in the wake of General Suharto's 1965 coup. Along the way it also inscribes their boasts, confessions and reactions to the filming. As self-incrimination, it's surely evidence enough to open several cases at the International Criminal Court. But it's also an indictment of the continuing corruption of a nation – and deeply double-edged about cinema itself; the main subject, two-bit cinema showman Anwar, describes how he killed while high on John Wayne movies and big-screen sadism, in defence of his freedom to import profitable Hollywood movies. Most remarkable is that the film achieves its testimony and impact through an honest, unsparing intimacy and refusal to judge; its quest for empathy is the ultimate rejoinder to what it confronts. Unsurprisingly, the festival jury gave it the main Dox:Award, and Indonesian juror Edwin took the stage to ask his government for a state apology for crimes against humanity.

After that, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's *Leviathan* – a spirit-eyed sea-abattoir portrait as unblinking as Georges Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes* – only seemed to further the horror theme. There was further nautical speculation on mass extinction in Daniel Dencik's *Expedition to the End of the World*, joining a crew of scientists and artists exploring the newly thawed fjords of northern Greenland. Sabine Gruffat's *I Have Always Been a Dreamer* projects the industrial ruination (and grassroots revival) of Detroit onto modern-day Dubai. Jonas Poher Rasmussen's slippery, wayward, often eerie *Searching for Bill* makes a partly staged road journey through Detroit from trailer-park Louisiana to California's post-capitalist Slab City and the sea.

It was nice, after all that, to find a film or two that offered some hope for the species. Andreas M. Dalsgaard's *The Human Scale* roves the globe studying the changes rung by Danish architect Jan Gehl and his associates – who preach a humanist doctrine of reclaiming the streets – on cities from Copenhagen to New York and Melbourne (and its promise for the likes of Chongqing and Dhaka). More complex – and ambivalent – was Maja Borg's *Future My Love*, a bold archive/interview/epistolary mashup built around the 95-year-old technophile futurist Jacque Fresco, singing his vision of a post-money, resource-based better world even more urgently as he packs up his Florida Venus Project for want of cash. 📺

 Also online this month, Nick Bradshaw reports from Amsterdam's International Documentary Festival at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound



'The Human Scale'

THESSALONIKI STRAITENED CIRCUMSTANCES

The absence of financial prizes to accompany awards was just one way this year's festival reflected Greek economic realities

By Lydia Papadimitriou

Countering the image of protesting crowds in the streets of crisis-ridden Greece, the actual crowds encountered at the 53rd Thessaloniki International Film Festival in November were prospective audiences queueing to secure a return ticket in the sold-out daily screenings. During a week when the latest round of deep financial cuts was being voted on by the Greek parliament and public transport was hindered by strikes and marches, attendance at the festival was six per cent up on last year. Cinema's ability to act as escapism, invite contemplation and raise troubling questions was reaffirmed.

This is the third festival run by Dimitris Eipidis, whose vision of promoting an 'independent', alternative and socially conscious cinema is evident not only in the official selection of the International Competition, but also in the accompanying sections: Open Horizons, Balkan Survey (programmed by Dimitris Kerkinos), Greek

Athena Rachel Tsangari's surrealist-inspired fantasy 'The Capsule' impressed with the confidence of its vision

Films, the provocative *Night Views* and the auteur-focused retrospectives. The tragic loss in a motorbike accident earlier this year of Greece's most widely recognised auteur Theo Angelopoulos deservedly motivated a tribute in his memory, and also prompted the naming of the top award after the director. Aside from the screening of three of his films, a round-table with Angelopoulos's key collaborators provided some very moving moments and a great insight into the director's working practices and personality.

Among the auteur retrospectives, the one dedicated to Romanian filmmaker Cristian Mungiu ranged from his rarely screened early shorts to his latest Cannes-awarded 'Beyond the Hills', which received a special audience prize. Portugal-based Finn Aki Kaurismäki's retrospective was also very well received – even if his controversial views about refusing to shoot in digital or his radical solutions to the Greek financial crisis may have raised some eyebrows.

The Greek section included 14 films premiering at the festival – two of which were also selected for the international competition. Set on the island of Hydra, Athena Rachel Tsangari's surrealist-inspired, haute couture-clad fantasy 'The Capsule' – about a dominatrix and her female disciples – impressed with the confidence of its vision. Financed by an art collector, the 35-minute



Strapped for cash: 'The Capsule'

film is firmly placed within an avant-garde experimental tradition and detached from any references to social reality. This is in sharp contrast to the majority of Greek films shown which addressed the topic of crisis, however obliquely. Konstantina Voulgaris's 'A.C.A.B.: All Cats Are Brilliant' (a rather enigmatic translation of the original 'Syncharitiria stous Aisiodoxous') is a sensitive portrait of a young 'anarchist' woman, portraying sympathetically the social milieu and values she represents. Newcomer Ektoras Lygizos's 'Boy Eating the Bird's Food' ('To Agori Troei to Fagito tou Pouliou'), which participated in the international competition, is a visceral and highly effective study of hunger. With the camera focusing closely on the young but suffering body of its lead Yannis Papadopoulos (who justly won the best actor award for his subtle but physically uninhibited performance), the film relentlessly shows the mental and physical effects of unwilling starvation. Without explicit references to Greek social reality, its contemporary relevance is nonetheless all too obvious, and its implicit commentary powerful.

A vital part of the festival is Agora Industry, which consists of the Crossroads co-production section and a works-in-progress event, both of which reward selected projects with financing for development or post-production. This year, however, the festival's main awards were not accompanied by financial prizes – a concession to the need to economise. Led by academic Thomas Elsaesser, this year's international jury awarded the Golden Alexander-Theo Angelopoulos top award to Tobias Lindholm's 'A Hijacking' ('Kapringen'), a thriller about a group of Somali pirates who take control of a ship, and the tense negotiations that follow with the company's CEO. The Danish film also won the Fipresci award. But in many ways this year's top winner was Amir Manor's 'Epilogue', which gathered four prizes in total; a sensitive Israeli film about an elderly couple and their latter-day disillusionment, it's reminiscent of 'Amour'.

This was a festival where the social dimension entered the auditorium in more ways than one. The storming of the cinema by a group of trade unionists at the start of the closing ceremony was a tangible reminder that the crowds queueing by the ticket booths were not so far from those protesting in the streets after all. 📺

COMPETITIONS

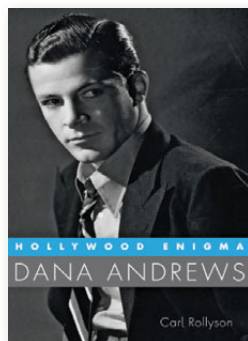
DANA ANDREWS: FIVE BIOGRAPHIES TO BE WON

Dana Andrews worked with such distinguished directors as John Ford, Otto Preminger and Fritz Lang. His minimalist acting style gained him leading roles and praise, though he shunned the limelight. In *Hollywood Enigma* (published by University Press of Mississippi), biographer Carl Rollyson explores the actor's films, family background and his struggles with alcoholism and fame, drawing on diaries, letters and other documents to get behind the enigma of this elusive star.

To be in with a chance of winning,
simply answer the following question:

Q. In which Otto Preminger film did Dana Andrews NOT star?

- Fallen Angel
- Whirlpool
- Where the Sidewalk Ends



JONAS MEKAS: THREE PAIRS OF TICKETS TO SCREENINGS TO BE WON

Tying in with the Serpentine Gallery's Jonas Mekas exhibition, BFI Southbank has a season of the artist and filmmaker's work screening throughout December and January. *Paradise Not Yet Lost*, *Sleepless Nights*, *Stories* and *He Stands in the Desert* *Counting the Seconds of His Life* are some of the films screening. We are offering a pair of tickets to three readers to a screening of their choice. (See terms and conditions.)

To be in with a chance of winning,
simply answer the following question:

Q. Which film won best documentary at the Venice Film Festival in 1963?

- The Brig
- Guns of the Trees
- Walden, Diaries, Notes and Sketches



For more details of the screenings visit: bfi.org.uk/whatson

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To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic bonanza, simply answer the following question:

Q. In Greek mythology, what gift did the Titan Prometheus steal for humankind?

- Water
- Fire
- Air



HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Christmas bumper prize', 'Jonas Mekas competition' or 'Dana Andrews competition' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk
Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Christmas bumper prize', 'Jonas Mekas competition', or 'Dana Andrews competition' at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

The deadline for the Jonas Mekas competition is Monday 17 December 2012. The deadline for all other competitions is Tuesday 15 January 2013.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

* The prizewinners of the Jonas Mekas competition will be picked at random and notified on the closing date.

* The prizewinners of all other competitions will be picked at random and notified within ten days of the closing date.

* Film screening choices made by winners of the Jonas Mekas ticket competition at the BFI Southbank will be subject to availability.

* Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash.

* The BFI may wish to contact you to keep you informed of future events. Please indicate on your email/postcard if you do not wish to hear from the BFI regarding any other BFI promotions or news.

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V&A 'Hollywood Costume' book

Graham Dolphin, Matthew Leo, John Waters.



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THE SEA INSIDE

Ang Lee has based his films on a phenomenally diverse range of literature, from Jane Austen (*Sense and Sensibility*) to Annie Proulx (*Brokeback Mountain*) via Wang Dulu (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). But in bringing to the screen Yann Martel's magic-realist Booker Prize-winner *Life of Pi*, the director has set himself his most complex technical challenge to date

By Roger Clarke

Spoiler alert: this article gives away plot twists

It might be said that there are two kinds of Ang Lee film – the baroque athletic action-style titles and the ‘feast’ pictures. His latest *Life of Pi*, adapted from the Yann Martel novel that has sold more than 7 million copies, is a synthesis of these two models. It’s a feast, visually, and certainly more theologically inclined than his usual story landscapes. It revisits the hard-play bells-and-whistles dynamism of 2000’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (and whisper it softly, *Hulk*), but also recalls feast films such as *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), although in this case the feast is starvation and the chef is the villain. Those feast films also have their sense of burdens to be borne and individuality to be gained, often at the expense of the family unit or a patriarch. It’s not wholly surprising to find a tiger (imagination, power, concealment) associated with one of Lee’s films once more, though this time it’s a tiger who comes to 3D.

Life of Pi is the story of an Indian boy named Piscine Molitor Patel, shortened to Pi. He grows up in the former French colony of Pondicherry, where his father runs a small zoo in the city’s botanical gardens. Young Pi is eccentric and deeply interested in religion, at various stages trying out Christianity and Islam alongside his native Hinduism, to the exasperation of his Francophile father, who worships the glories and atheistic freedoms of the Enlightenment. For reasons that are never wholly explained in the film (social unrest is hinted at off screen in its 1977 time-frame), Mr Patel decides to emigrate to Canada, taking his family and exotic zoo animals with him. The Japanese cargo ship on which they sail sinks in a terrible storm, and Pi finds himself adrift on the ocean in a lifeboat, with a ferocious tiger for company.

Much of the film is imbued with a sense of drifting slow starvation, shot through with bolts of panic as the boy has to cope with an aggressive and hungry predator waiting for him to falter for a second. As the days go by, events become increasingly hallucinogenic, including a

visit to a floating island, which turns out to be carnivorous, eating the unwary at night. The ordeal is very much presented as a spiritual progression, with Pi overcoming his fears and taming the tiger, though in his darkest moments crying out to God like a mystic in the desert.

Echoing the hyper-real and hyper-cultural constructs of the story, the technical effects don’t have the vaudevilian quality of most 3D films. Great care, for example, is given to a cobweb in the mid-ground. One of the effects Lee most seems to love is the swimming human body, suspended in a kind of aquatic swoon. Swimming seems to be a form of flying, of exultation. In early shots we see Pi’s father enjoying a swim in Paris so much that he names his son after the pool – Piscine. Later Pi watches underwater as the ship goes down or animals swim, and on another occasion he falls from his boat and enters a liquid world as phantasmagorical as anything from Miyazaki Hayao. The glossy reflections of water and light on water, of luminescence, are constant refrains. Whereas some directors would use the effects to create a visual version of the sustain pedal, Lee’s effects are somehow refreshing, a sherbet served by houris. 



BLUE SCREEN

For Ang Lee, above, a director best-known for intimate human dramas, the 3D *Life of Pi* represents a return to the effects-dominated filmmaking of his ill-fated superhero movie *Hulk*



The tiger in the story is called Richard Parker – also the name of a mutinous sailor in the Edgar Allan Poe novel ‘The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket’

FEARFUL SYMMETRY
The tiger with whom Pi is confined on a lifeboat is a blend of live action and visual effects



But he's capable of old-time, literal grandiosity as well. In a spirit of fidelity to Martel's vision of the zoo in Pondicherry, for example, Lee went to the trouble of shooting on location in the region after adapting the local botanical gardens.

A MOVEABLE FEAST

Ang Lee is well known for his love of food, and his earlier films *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* revolve around this idea. When he goes on shoots, he is known to make and freeze two months' worth of meals for his microbiologist wife. So it's interesting that the secret villain of *Life of Pi* is a chef, played with some relish by Gérard Depardieu, with all the girth and reduced sauces and potential triple-bypasses that involves. I say secret villain because, well, it's complicated, but the narrative structure of the film involves Pi telling the story to a 'writer' in his Canadian home, and at the very end Pi tells a second version of the same shipwreck events that revolves around the chef in a tale of unutterable horror and human delinquency on the high seas.

There is a touch of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moby Dick* to this tale, both in the book and film versions. There's even a touch of Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*, with its entry into a magical world and a supping with monsters. The tale of the sailor, the shipwreck and the castaway has very deep roots in Western literature, and it's a narrative difficult to relay as a film because – as, say, in Robert Zemeckis's *Cast Away* (2000) – slow starvation isn't pretty to watch. There's also an immediate dramatic problem with the lack of people to interact with. But newcomer Suraj Sharma, a junior black belt in karate, is compelling in the title role, giving added authenticity by losing weight during the filming process. (The *Cast Away* production had gone even further, stopping filming to allow Tom Hanks the time to become emaciated.) And the visual representation of his reality – are the tiger, orangutan, zebra and

hyena in the lifeboat even really there? – has an unexpected muscularity and heft, unlike those films in which the inner life of a character is presented on screen like an eruption of coloured balloons (*Amélie*, for example).

TIGER ASPECTS

"The tiger is not your friend," thunders Mr Patel to his son when he gets himself into a dangerous situation at the zoo. "Animals don't think like we do; people who forget that get themselves killed." *Life of Pi*'s visual-effects supervisor Bill Westenhofer worked on the lion in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and it's to his credit that the tiger never feels anthropomorphised. Working with the animal trainer from *Gladiator*, Thierry Le Portier, Westenhofer sourced his movements from three tigers in France and one in Canada. A moveable boat was even set up in a tiger enclosure to capture some scenes.

The tiger in the story is called Richard Parker – a fact explained in the film's narration by a mix-up when the animal was delivered to the zoo, which inadvertently switched the name of the hunter and the tiger, who had originally been named Thirsty. But one senses, correctly, that there's even more to this name than meets the eye. In fact, Richard Parker is also the name of a mutinous sailor in the Edgar Allan Poe novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, published in 1838. He owned a dog called 'Tiger'. The name also has strong associations with cannibalism at sea, of the kind well documented in A.W. Brian Simpson's book *Cannibalism and the Common Law*, which goes into great detail about a cabin boy eaten by his crew-mates Dudley and Stevens when the ship *Mignonette* sank in 1884. The boy's name, by coincidence, was Richard Parker. As a result of their cannibalism, the law in Great Britain, and subsequently the high seas, was changed to make such feasts illegal – extraordinarily, they had not been previously.

Look long and hard at Gérard Depardieu in the one scene where he appears – as a contemptuous and greasy chef refusing to serve vegetarians in the bowels of the ship *Tsimtsum*, whose very name evokes the steam of Cantonese cuisine. In the story within the story within the story of this film, he is the hyena who is the real threat to the life of the Indian boy, a man quite capable of eating human flesh to stay alive in the days and weeks adrift at sea. The tiger is Pi all along, his yang energy, his *viagra* (the Sanskrit word for tiger).

Lee must recognise aspects of himself in Pi, his childhood spent travelling with his parents between East and West, never quite fitting in to either zone. It's a film about baggage and cargo, about the horror of the world expressed by a dream. But it's primarily a story about storytelling itself, a position flagged up initially as a man (the 'writer', played by Rafe Spall) sits down with another man (the adult Pi), many years after the event. Pi tells the same story he has already told the Japanese insurers after his eventual salvation; but then, after pressure, he retells the 'real' version of what happened. "Which story do you prefer?" Pi asks.

And then his wife and children arrive at the door of his Canadian home, and all is happiness and domesticity. "Do you want to stay for dinner?" Pi asks the writer. "She's a very good cook."



'Life of Pi' is released in the UK on 20 December, and is one of our Films of the Month on page 86

MAGIC REALISM

Visual-effects supervisor Bill Westenhofer on how key images from *'Life of Pi'* were created. **Interview by James Bell**



THE WHALE

That was all created through visual effects, though the inspiration is something that does actually happen, that bioluminescence of plankton in the water. We studied lots of breaching whales for reference. Ang does a lot of research, to the point where he took us out on a boat one night to see a bioluminescent plankton spawn off the south coast of Taiwan. We had filmed reference

shots of dolphins swimming through it, which created almost a wind-tunnel effect of plankton coming off. The experiences we had doing the research will be the thing I'll remember most about making the film. One night we got to go out on a coastguard cutter off the coast of Taiwan in heavy storm surges. Ang wanted us to see it and feel how the boat would react in stormy seas.



THE SEA

Ang has told me that sailors have come up to him to thank him because, although no one believes it, the ocean can get that calm and mirror-like. In this case the giant custom-made wave tank we had built gets to be useless, because without any ripples through the water you're seeing clean through to

the bottom, so we erased the tank and put in digital water. Usually, the wave-making machines could do a decent job of imitating the swells of ocean surge – that slow up and down. But sometimes Ang wanted it bigger, so we would digitally match the tank, and then push it further than the tank allowed.

THE ANIMALS

If you were to add up all the other films I've worked on combined, they still don't quite reach this one in terms of the technical challenges we faced. There is a blending of live action and effects with the animals, but it might be smaller than people think; only 14 per cent of the shots are real tigers, the rest are digital. One of the early decisions we made was how much of the real tigers to use. I talked a lot with Ang, and we collectively decided that we wanted to use real tigers wherever we could. We wanted to set a bar for ourselves that was as high as possible.

We had tigers brought to us in Taiwan, which meant we had more access to get references than we ever would have otherwise. In the past, when I worked on *Narnia* for example, I only had a day to get references; this time we had eight weeks, and got them in the real environment. The access we had enabled us to put in tiny details: when the tiger shifts his weight, we'd watch that and then put in details starting from muscle movements in his paw all the way up the arm.

The folly of anthropomorphising animals is something that's very important in Yann Martel's book, and in Ang's film. We've done digital animals before, tried to make them as believable as possible, but then they get up and dance or whatever. Here we had the chance to let a tiger be a tiger. It's an animal, and any characteristic that you see that feels human is just yourself reflected back. I told the crew that, if we were ever going to fool an audience into believing what they see to be real, this was it.



CARNIVOROUS TREES

Production designer David Gropman on how the film's fantastic settings were rooted in reality. **Interview by James Bell**



THE ISLAND

From a production-design point of view, the biggest challenge of the film was designing the island. The greatness of Yann Martel's novel is his ability to make you believe in everything he's writing, so the first thing I tried to do was find out what the carnivorous trees he writes about are in reality. Of course they don't really exist. We looked at all kinds of vegetation around the world, but with the story beginning in India and the banyan tree being such a part of the Indian landscape, it soon became the obvious prototype for what the island should look like.

As a designer I wanted to create something you could believe was real—I was determined that what the island became was based on reality. To that end we started scouting locations that might stand in for the island. Ang, who grew up in Taiwan, knew of a banyan tree preserve in the south of the island. The first time we walked into it I said we would be crazy not to shoot there. That became the basis for the island, and then we built up on it from there. Obviously the banyan preserve didn't have a bed of living roots, it had dirt and rock, so we added all of that. All of this was developed by illustrations we did very early on, which evolved as we scouted real locations, and hopefully added a greater sense of reality.

THE ZOO

After working on sketches in the States, I decided I had to visit some of the older zoos in India. Ang had already been to India on a recce, and I retraced his steps. As a designer I like to start with a reference that's as real as possible, so I was scouting zoos with the hope that we would find something that would work for the story. In the end that didn't happen, though there was a great deal of inspiration. In the town of Pondicherry, where the story takes place and where we filmed, there is a botanical garden that was built at the turn of the [last] century. We decided to use it as the basis of our zoo, and that inspired the gate (right).

Ang liked the fact that I'd started out as a theatre designer. He wanted to see the film as though you were looking at a stage; there was the proscenium, and within it was this world, but you could choose to focus on whatever part of the world you wanted to. We took that idea very specifically with the zoo. A lot of the exhibits have backdrops which we created, and of course being zoo exhibits, they are framed as though by a proscenium.



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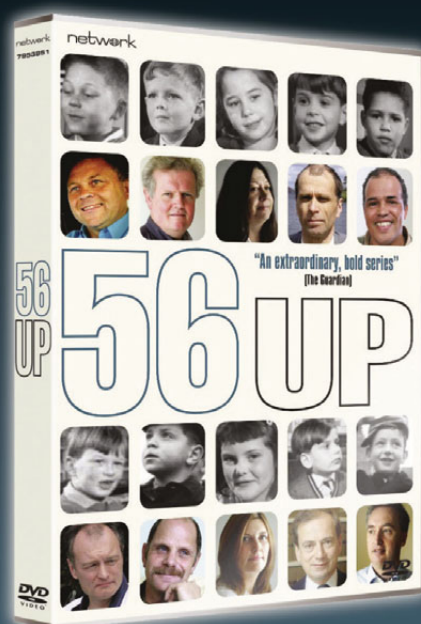
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THE DEVIL, POSSIBLY

The films of writer-director Bruno Dumont inhabit a spiritual landscape that can seem as bleak and forbidding as the northern French countryside he sets them in. But his sixth feature 'Hors Satan', he says, completes his quest to find the sacred in grim everyday reality

By David Jenkins

With his film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967), Jean-Luc Godard unwittingly attached a cosmic stigma to the subsequent filming of coffee. About halfway in to Bruno Dumont's sixth feature *Hors Satan*, there's a POV shot of coffee swirling in a bowl. It's almost a knee-jerk reaction to read this potentially humdrum insert as a subtle evocation of man clasping the universe in his hands. Only here, another character then adds some milk in which there are large, unsightly lumps of cream. The milk is stirred, and the lumps float and bob like giant chunks of space debris. Maybe nothing particularly deep was meant by this shot – or maybe it was Dumont's way of insouciantly destroying the known galaxy?

That's a bit of a stretch, perhaps, but it's a gesture that would certainly be in keeping with Dumont's remarkable, if unabashedly bleak cinematic oeuvre. From his miraculous 1996 debut feature *La Vie de Jésus*, via his Cannes *succès de scandale*, *L'Humanité* (1999), and his sexed-up sojourn in the Joshua Tree desert, *Twentynine Palms* (2003), through to his pair of politically inflected metaphysical fables, *Flanders* (2005) and *Hadewijch* (2009), Dumont has made a habit of destroying his characters at the bat of an eyelid.

Arguably his most spare and surreal film to date, *Hors Satan* follows an unnamed messianic vagabond (David Dewaele) as he aimlessly traipses across the picturesque expanses of Northern France's Opal Coast between Calais and Boulogne. With various loosely defined supernatural capabilities, he exists as protector to a pallid, monosyllabic goth played by Alexandra Lemâtre. He murders her abusive father with his poaching rifle and later clubs a local park ranger nearly to death as punishment for his transgressions. But he also has the capacity for good, employing his strange powers to heal the sick and, in one instance, raise a character from the dead.

Biblical motifs abound in *Hors Satan*, including burning bushes and walking on water. "It's a much more symbolic film than usual," admits the intense and outspoken Dumont. "Following *Hadewijch*, I knew I wanted to make a more intimate film. I wanted it to be in the country and not the city. I wanted to be more precise with the sacred dimension that *Hadewijch* was taking us into. I believe that *Hors Satan* incarnates a primitive new world. It's like a Walt Disney cartoon. You have modern mores and customs, but you're in a magical, mythological place."

Beyond this brief description, further discussion of what *Hors Satan* is actually about amounts to this: "It's the story of an exorcist" – although one might see it as a film which suggests that Christ and Satan, good and evil, are entirely subjective and, in fact, one and the same

thing. Dumont does admit, however, that Dewaele's character, with his puffy eyes, weather-beaten visage and greasy hair, is the same one the actor played in *Hadewijch*. Although 'played' is perhaps the wrong word. "No, he doesn't play," Dumont insists. "He is the character. If I talk about the character, I talk about *him*. I wrote the script while thinking about him, so at no point did I have to explain anything to him."

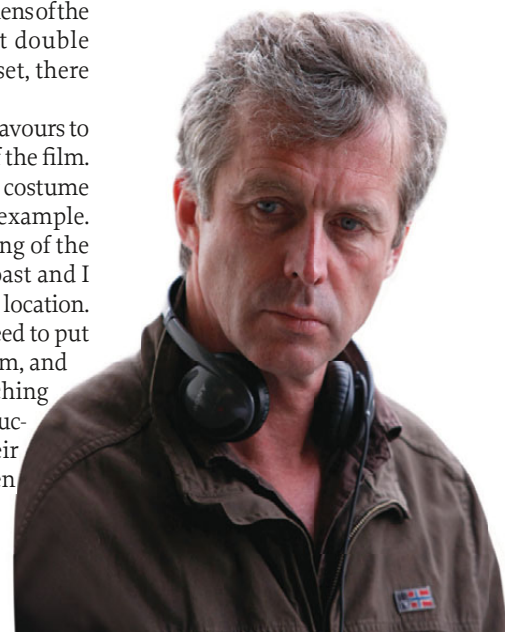
Dumont's actors seldom get to see a script – a technique he uses in an attempt to retain their purity and innocence. Yet with the film's surfeit of ghostly tracking shots, mesmeric close-ups and resplendent magic-hour panoramas, it's hard to visualise what a Dumont script would actually look like. "The first draft takes a very literary form," he explains. "I write the film in a novelistic way. There is no hint of cinematographic technique. Already by writing the title *Hors Satan*, I had something interesting. From a literature point of view, there was something I was going to need to work out. But how?"

"I believe literature enables us to reach sensations," he continues. "I describe in my writings a sensory world. And using different means, film evokes those same sensations. With regards to the murder at the beginning of the film, the only thing I'm interested in is how it feels. My scripts are not illustrative. They're inspirational."

As well as being strict about how he works with his actors, it's important to Dumont that an ideological sympathy be present among the technical crew. "It's a very sensitive thing," he says. "On *La Vie de Jésus* I worked with a cameraman who was very close to me. Each time we completed a shot he would go up in ecstasy. And that was really tiresome. I prefer my technicians to be neutral. They have to be objective. In French, the lens of the camera is [called] the *objectif*, so it has that double meaning. Film is a technical business. On a set, there shouldn't be a friendly atmosphere."

Just as he does with his actors, Dumont endeavours to submerge his technical crew into the world of the film. "Initially I wasn't happy with a suggestion the costume designer had given me," he recalls by way of example. "I believed she had intellectualised her reading of the script. So I asked her to come to the Opal Coast and I spent two hours with her walking through the location. And then she got it. She stopped thinking. I need to put them in this cleansing bath to assimilate them, and then they actually come up with a lot of enriching ideas. It works really well. It's like being a conductor, and they are all soloists. They can put their soul into their part, but the music is all written for them."

GET THEE BEHIND ME
In 'Hors Satan', the new
feature by director
Bruno Dumont, below, a girl
(Alexandra Lemâtre, above)
is taken under the wing
of a messianic wanderer
(David Dewaele, above right)





Working again with cinematographer Yves Cape, Dumont is undeniably a world-class image-maker. Painting has long been an inspiration: *La Vie de Jésus* was influenced by the work of abstract painter Paul Brach, while the framing of human faces in *Flanders* drew on various portraits by Francis Bacon. "I'm not such a cinephile," the director explains. "I don't really go to the cinema. For me, film is often too fast. With a painting, I can stop and take my time. If you look at a painting by Nicolas Poussin, for example, there's a whole literature that can come out of that single frame – a whole narrative that you draw from the background, the tone, the colours. These emotions are more interesting to me than film."

"I believe that painting makes people more intelligent than cinema does," he says, expanding on his theme. "There are beautiful books on painting. On cinema? Hmm... There are great movies, but I don't feel they necessarily inspire great writing. Painting inspires a meditative situation because it is static. It's much more complicated to analyse a film which is moving. Critics don't normally analyse. They talk about the background and the essence of a film, but there's a difficulty in actually grasping cinema. That's why in my films, the shots are slow and there's not much dialogue. There's time for the viewer to impregnate themselves with the image. Of course, I'm not a painter. I have to make cinema. That's just me."

Dumont feels that *Hors Satan* is the purest distillation of his project to date, but it also serves as a cinematic full stop to his prolonged exploration of the spiritual world.

"I believe that *Hors Satan* really gets closest to this quest I've been on regarding the sacred and spiritual grace," he says. "In a very elaborate way, it reaches many of the things I've wanted it to reach. After that, I'll go off and do something else. I cannot deal with those subjects again."

Shooting has already been completed on Dumont's next film *Camille Claudel, 1915*, which tells the story of the eponymous sculptor, who was placed in a mental asylum by her brother and forbidden to practise her art. It's surprising to hear that the always intrepid Juliette Binoche is the star of the film, as her expressive, energetic acting style is surely the antithesis of the typical Dumont lead. "It's a bit like a sculpture needing the right material to work with," the director comments. "There are actors who say they want to work with me, but I don't see what I could do with them. The day I get it and I see something, I'll use them. Where [Binoche] is at in her cinema, I believe she wants to come towards me. It's common ground. It's not me, it's not her. It's us."

It wasn't, however, Binoche's exemplary acting track record that captured the director's imagination. "I saw her on TV at one point talking about her paintings, and she really moved me," Dumont recalls. "She wasn't talking about her work as an actress. It was the difficulty she had in expressing herself in relation to her painting that caught my attention. The character in the film is an artist, so I need an artist. It's finding that peat in the original earth. She has a sensibility, and that's what I direct."



'Hors Satan' is released in the UK on 4 January, and is one of our Films of the Month on page 82

I don't really go to the cinema. For me, film is often too fast. With a painting, I can stop and take my time



IN CALIFORNIA
For his second feature
'Seven Psychopaths'
writer-director Martin
McDonagh, left, reteams
with Colin Farrell, right,
following their earlier
collaboration on 'In Bruges'

MURDER HE WROTE

The title 'Seven Psychopaths' may allude to Kurosawa, but it's American pulp cinema that informs London-Irish playwright-turned-film director Martin McDonagh's follow-up to 'In Bruges', as a blocked screenwriter turns to some real-life psychopaths for inspiration

By Nick James

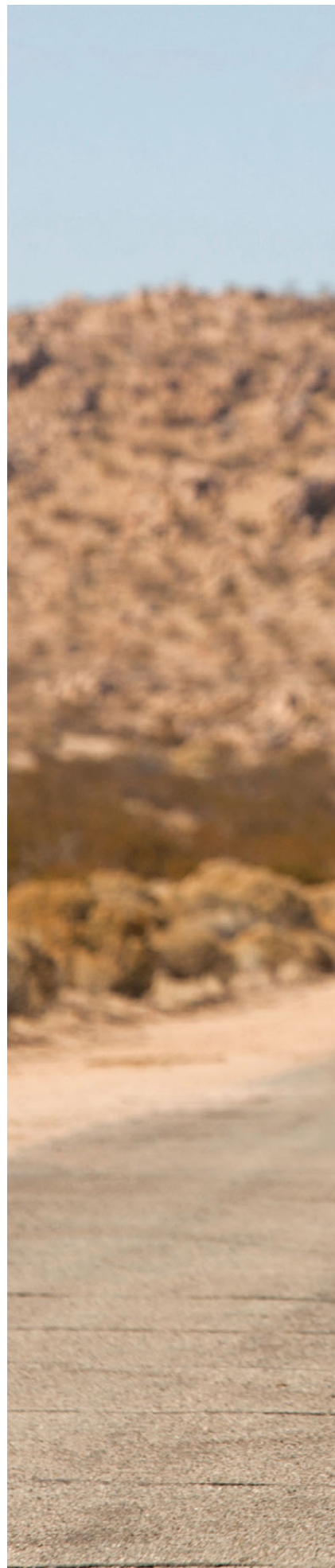
Back in the late 1980s and 90s, in the days of post-modernity, there was a vogue for super-smart self-referential scripts in Hollywood. People like Shane Black (*Lethal Weapon*, *The Last Boy Scout* – and he's currently making a comeback as the writer-director of *Iron Man 3*) were revered and richly rewarded for being able to produce mainstream action entertainment that nonetheless spoofed itself merrily. The other major name – whose films tended to push the boundaries of bad taste more than sharp dialogue – was, of course, Joe Eszterhas, best known for *Basic Instinct*. The two scribes jostled to become the highest-paid screenwriters at a time when script was king.

In a way, this self-referential bent in films was merely an amplification of the kind of classic Hollywood know- ingness that Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond practised – as exemplified by the famous ending of *Some Like It Hot*, when Jack Lemmon finally reveals he's a man, and Joe E. Brown says, "Well, nobody's perfect." Lately, however, Hollywood action scripts that send themselves up have become more coy about it. One thing that's obvious about the James Bond of *Skyfall*, for instance, is that it has damped down the levels of self-spoofing that were the series's *raison d'être* in the Roger Moore years.

Which brings us to Martin McDonagh, a London-Irish dramatist first known for two trilogies of plays set in the vicinity of Galway, published and (mostly) performed between 1996 and 2001: the Leenane trilogy and the Aran

Islands trilogy. Having made an impact with his Oscar-winning short *Six Shooter* (2004), in his film-directorial debut *In Bruges* (2007) he found new, wry ways not only to mock the dilemmas of assassins killing time in a Belgian town, but also to critique the whole culture of screen violence while still indulging in it. There's a small illustrative parallel, for instance, between the moment where *Skyfall*'s Bond – issued by Q only with the traditional Walther PPK and a small radio transmitter – is told, apropos gadgets, "We don't really go in for that anymore," and the scene in *In Bruges* where Harry (Ralph Fiennes), the contemptuous British gangster, is offered a range of weapons, and baulks at an Uzi: "I don't want to kill a careful of black kids," he says. "I want an ordinary gun."

Martin McDonagh's blessing/curse is that he to some extent combines the talents of Black and Eszterhas, in that he writes fizzing character dialogue, can do 'turn on a dime' dramatic switcheroos, can keep several plot strands going at once, and has a very dark sense of humour. His new film *Seven Psychopaths* is a very funny comedy about the whole culture of Hollywood genre pics, starring many of the most enjoyably iconic incarnators of murderousness the present day has to offer. Its central character Marty (Colin Farrell) is a heavy-drinking Hollywood screenwriter who's been kicked out of his apartment by his girlfriend and moves in with his unpredictable pal Billy (Sam Rockwell), a sometime actor who's also part of a pet-snatching racket run







by Hans (Christopher Walken). Marty has writer's block – his script is called *Seven Psychopaths* (did you guess?), but there's only one psychopath character in his head – and Billy tries to nudge him out of it by encouraging him to meet actual psychopaths.

Billy doesn't know, however, that a stolen shih-tzu he himself is minding for Hans belongs to Charlie (Woody Harrelson), a merciless killer. At Marty's side, so to speak, we find out about the quaker (Harry Dean Stanton) who haunts the man he believes raped and killed his daughter; about the Buddhist psychopath who's sworn not to kill (Long Nguyen); and about Zachariah and Maggie (Tom Waits and Amanda Warren), who exterminate serial killers.

Kurosawa was one of my early heroes. The title 'Seven Psychopaths' is pretty much stolen from 'Seven Samurai'

As you can see, *Seven Psychopaths* is a film that comes out of a mix of genre traditions. That it was written seven years ago makes sense when you consider that then was the heyday of Charlie Kaufman's extremely screenwriter-centric visions such as *Adaptation* (2002). McDonagh also shares a love of black humour and seemingly off-subject dialogue with Tarantino, though he's much more interested in drama – and less so in spectacles of cool for their own sake.

What I enjoyed most about *Seven Psychopaths* is that it's so at ease with itself. It gathers together a bunch of hair-trigger personalities (played by cult-favourite names) to act out the meanings of murder and peace in the safety (for bystanders at least) of the desert. Its way of getting them there is very sharp and funny, and once they're there, debating how Marty's script should end, McDonagh has put himself exactly where he wants to be: where talk is the solution to action.

The following interview took place during the recent BFI London Film Festival. **Please note that the interview includes a couple of plot spoilers.**

Nick James: I've heard you took just six weeks to write the script for 'Seven Psychopaths'.

Martin McDonagh: Yes, but there was a lot I had already planned. The quaker-psychopath story was already there. Tom Waits's backstory was already there. I knock 'em out quite quickly and then don't do anything for ages.

NJ: Were you in the same predicament as Colin Farrell's Marty, with just the title and one psychopath in the bag?

MM: With a title, not wanting it to be about guns and wanting it to be about love and peace and Gandhi instead. The dog-kidnapping plot came very quickly – I'd heard that as a vague true story from five years before. There's such a joy to writing a character like Sam Rockwell's Billy, who can say anything and take the story to any particular place at any time. That's what made it fast.

NJ: How did you nuance your psychopaths? I looked at various dictionary definitions of the term – they seemed shockingly vague.

MM: These characters aren't true to the definition. Maybe Charlie – Woody Harrelson's character – is, but real psychopaths don't have empathy. Billy is nuts, but he's not the typical psychopath, and Christopher Walken's Hans even says, "I wouldn't call myself a psychopath."

NJ: Why did you do this film now?

MM: To question the themes of violence and the Hollywood clichés of genre pics – and have fun. It's not a heavy, didactic anti-gun film, but it pokes fun at enough of those things to end up, hopefully, more thoughtful than the usual Hollywood genre pic.

NJ: Did you have these actors in mind?

MM: I often have Sam Rockwell's voice in my head when I'm writing a character like this. I did it for a play that he and Christopher did in New York in 2010 [*A Behanding in Spokane*]. That was the first time I met Christopher. But this script was written seven years ago, before I made *In Bruges*, long before I thought I would be in a position to direct a film. So writing with actors in mind wasn't even a possibility. Sam has played a lot of fun characters who turn scary on a dime, so it's a useful tool to have a voice like his in your head. But I feel like I'm done with that kind of character now.

SCRIPT RESEARCH

From left: the involvement of writer Marty (Colin O'Farrell) with the dog-stealing racket of Hans (Christopher Walken) and Billy (Sam Rockwell) leads him to psychopath Charlie (Woody Harrelson)

MAN WITH A TYPEWRITER

Like Colin Farrell's unfortunate Marty in 'Seven Psychopaths', any screenwriter who's the hero of a movie will invariably get a raw deal

By Ryan Gilbey

INT. COFFEE SHOP. DAY. A journalist ponders the comparative paucity of films which feature screenwriters among their dramatis personae. The writer John August (whose four screenplays for Tim Burton include *Frankenweenie*) recently issued a warning to anyone considering making a screenwriter their protagonist: "Movies about screenwriters are a hard sell. There are not a lot of big successful examples to point to... It shouldn't be a surprise that Hollywood is not knocking down your door to make that movie because it's just about a screenwriter. And who cares about a screenwriter?"

Who indeed? Even within the limited range of this minuscule sub-genre, most of the possible outcomes for a fictional screenwriter are unappetising. If there is a film about a screenwriter who doesn't end up compromised, disillusioned or dead, it is keeping a low profile – though *The Front* (1976), in which Woody Allen puts his name to the work of blacklisted screenwriters, at least ends with the hero principled, if pilloried. The message couldn't be clearer than in *Sunset Blvd* (1950). Who's that face-down in the swimming pool? "Nobody important, really. Just a movie writer with a couple of 'B' pictures to his credit. The poor dope. He always wanted a pool."

That's the dead screenwriter talking. Like any example of the writer on screen, this speech had to be written, in turn, by a writer (or three in this case). There's a conflicted tone to such onscreen self-deprecation; the screenwriter starts to resemble a wounded infantryman displaying his battle scars – then heading back into the melee. Writing for cinema is viewed by the movies themselves as misguided at best, corrupting at worst. In *Le Mépris* (1963), Paul (Michel Piccoli) rewrites a screenplay of *The Odyssey* purely for the dough, so no wonder this precipitates the breakdown of his marriage. In this view, as in the case of Holden Caulfield's older brother D.B. in *The Catcher in the Rye* – a writer who is "out in Hollywood... being a prostitute" – there can be few reasons other than financial ones for anyone halfway literate to throw in his or her lot with the movies. As Ian McEwan put it: "Screenwriting is an opportunity to fly first class, be treated like a celebrity,



WRITER AS HERO Nicolas Cage as Charlie Kaufman in 'Adaptation', written by the real Kaufman

sit around the pool and be betrayed."

In *Sweet Liberty* (1986), Alan Alda plays a history professor who discovers that his book about the American Revolution has been bowdlerised by Hollywood. He has only two problems with the screenplay: "The story and the dialogue." David Mamet's *State and Main* (2000) is also about the shooting of a historical movie, with Philip Seymour Hoffman as the naive, exploited screenwriter. Mamet famously described the industry's attitude towards writers with the motto: "Film is a collaborative business. Bend over."

Robert Altman was not renowned for his fidelity to the written word, so there was some irony in him directing *The Player* (1992), in which a screenwriter is murdered. (The wrong screenwriter, at that.) *The Player* also gets some laughs from the pitching process. Buck Henry tries to flog a sequel to *The Graduate*, and Richard E. Grant pitches a gritty death-row thriller which is compromised fully by the time it reaches the screen.

The profession lends itself to a feverish atmosphere, whether grave – the Harold Pinter-scripted *The Pumpkin Eater* (1964), starring Peter Finch as an unfaithful screenwriter – or comical, such as *Paris*

When It Sizzles (1964), with William Holden enlisting Audrey Hepburn to help him bash out a screenplay, various drafts of which are played out within the movie. That must have influenced *The Muse* (1999), where Albert Brooks rediscovers his screenwriting edge after meeting a mojo-restorer (Sharon Stone). Turns out she's also been helping Martin Scorsese, whom Brooks runs into in passing. "Hey, I sent you a script two years ago," he says. "Never got it," sniffs Scorsese, vanishing in a blur.

Adaptation (2002), about identical-twin screenwriters (both played by Nicolas Cage), has quickly become the king of screenwriter movies. Its unforeseen real-life punchline came when it earned a Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar nomination for Charlie Kaufman and his identical twin brother Donald. Yes, they are the heroes of *Adaptation* – but only one of them really exists. The film bears the influence of the Coen brothers' *Barton Fink* (1991), a stew of writer's-block paranoia and Hollywood scare stories which had its roots in the problematic migration to the movies of high-calibre writers like Clifford Odets.

With all this moral ambiguity swilling around screenwriting, it seems only right in Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* (1950) that the hero (Humphrey Bogart) should be a figure of suspicion and possible amorality. He knows how Hollywood works. "I make it a point to never see pictures I write," he shrugs. Confronted with the assumption that actors invent their lines, he shoots back: "When they get to be big stars, they usually do."

Perhaps that explains the illusions harboured by Michael Caine. "You know what you need to write a screenplay?" he once asked. "A pencil and a piece of paper." 9



WRITER AS SUSPECT 'In a Lonely Place'



PREGNANT PAUSE
Martin McDonagh told Christopher Walken, right, to “go even more Pinter” with his pauses in the hospital waiting-room scene with Woody Harrelson, left



NJ: There is a lot of violence in your work

MM: They tell me that. But even in *In Bruges*, in the first hour, there's only one dead kid. [Actually there's a dead priest too.] It's not a violent film. It's a film that discusses and questions violence, and [portrays someone who's] guilty about an act of violence. *Seven Psychopaths* turned out to have much more violence than was on the page. It's bit more graphic than I originally thought.

NJ: Did you experience the same problems as Marty about how to end it?

MM: Only in a very playful way. When Marty, Billy and Hans drive off into the desert and Marty says the characters should just talk for the next hour, that was a possibility, but after ten or 20 pages of just chatting you had to have some action. If you set up a ticking bomb, it has to explode.

NJ: So how did you tackle all this talk visually?

MM: If it's set outside in a beautiful landscape, catch that first. Then, how close you get just depends how important or emotional the scene is. We tried to do the opening scene in one take. That version was in the film for a while – one long take from the sign to the boys to them getting shot – but it was about three-and-a-half minutes long. It wasn't as punchy or exciting as jumping in, getting closer and getting out of the scene quicker. The scene when Brendan [Gleeson] gets the phone call [telling him to kill his partner] in *In Bruges* was always written to be one take. But for the campfire scene [in *Seven Psychopaths*], you could decide on the night that you want to cover Sam with a couple of cameras so you can jump in with any of the takes and then you just know that it's going to be cutaways to the boys, and that it's going to be a two-shot or one. There's probably more movement in *Seven Psychopaths* camera-wise than in *In Bruges*.

NJ: Are you someone who dwells a lot on getting the first scene right?

MM: No, that comes quickly. I jump in and see where it goes, and if it doesn't go anywhere I'll start again. The first, second and third scenes are usually the easiest. Not to get into any blind alleys after, that's the trick – to make sure it keeps opening up. You start juggling all those balls.

NJ: You have two interracial marriages in the film: Hans's wife Myra is African-American, and so is Maggie, the vanished wife of Zachariah. Are you making a point here?

MM: Unless you write a character as black they're never going to be cast that way. So why not have two couples who are interracial and not mention it, not question it – and have that be normal. So it's more about having the audience think about what they think of as normal, especially an American one, because you don't really see interracial couples anywhere, on TV or film.

NJ: The killing of Myra in the hospital was rather like a death scene in a Japanese film.

MM: Kurosawa was one of my early heroes. The title *Seven Psychopaths* is pretty much stolen from *Seven Samurai*. That's one of the most important scenes in the film, because it's the most moral. As underwritten as the female characters are, in that scene Myra is not – she's like the strongest and most moral person in film. That was a very important scene to get right – to have the fun lines from Woody, but also to have the seriousness of Myra's sacrifice. Maybe that's the Japanese thing, the sacrifice.

NJ: You point out the weakness of your women characters with an intertextual auto-critique.

MM: I figured I'd better do it first before you get in there! But I wouldn't have done it unless it was funny, and it is one of the funny lines when Chris comes out with that.

NJ: Can you describe your favourite scene?

MM: I like the stillness of the scene with Woody Harrelson and Christopher Walken in the hospital waiting area. Christopher and I both like Pinteresque pauses, and I remember saying, “We can go even more Pinter on this.” So Christopher would take at least 30 seconds between each line, which would screw with Woody – and you can see that in the scene. His character's irritation with the situation was made more palpable because of these weird pauses. Christopher keeps dropping the eye contact and smiling that beautiful Christopher Walken smile. But when he loses it, it's quite terrifying.

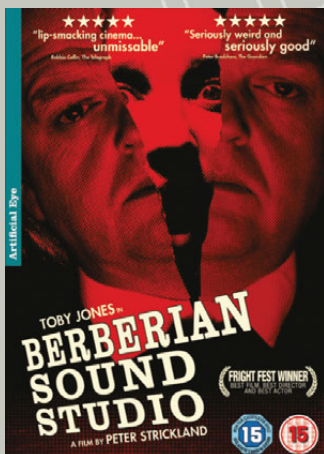


'Seven Psychopaths' is released in the UK on 5 December 2012, and is reviewed on page 107

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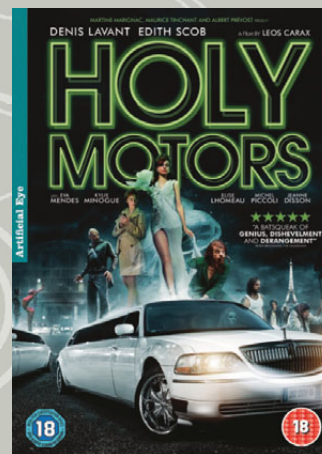
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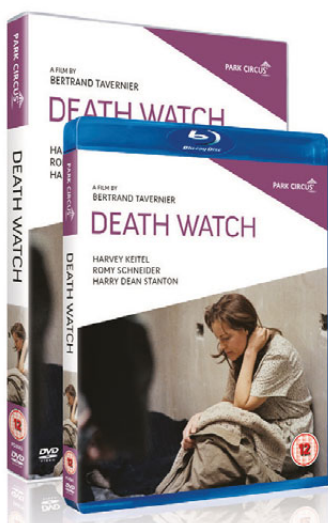
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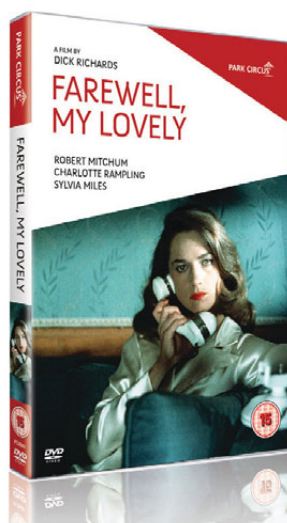
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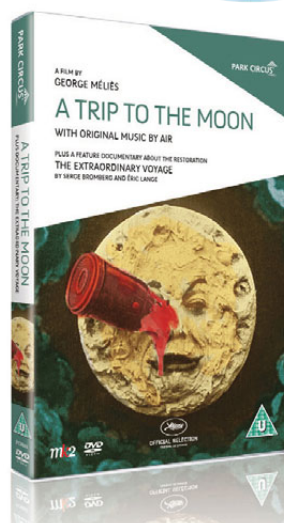
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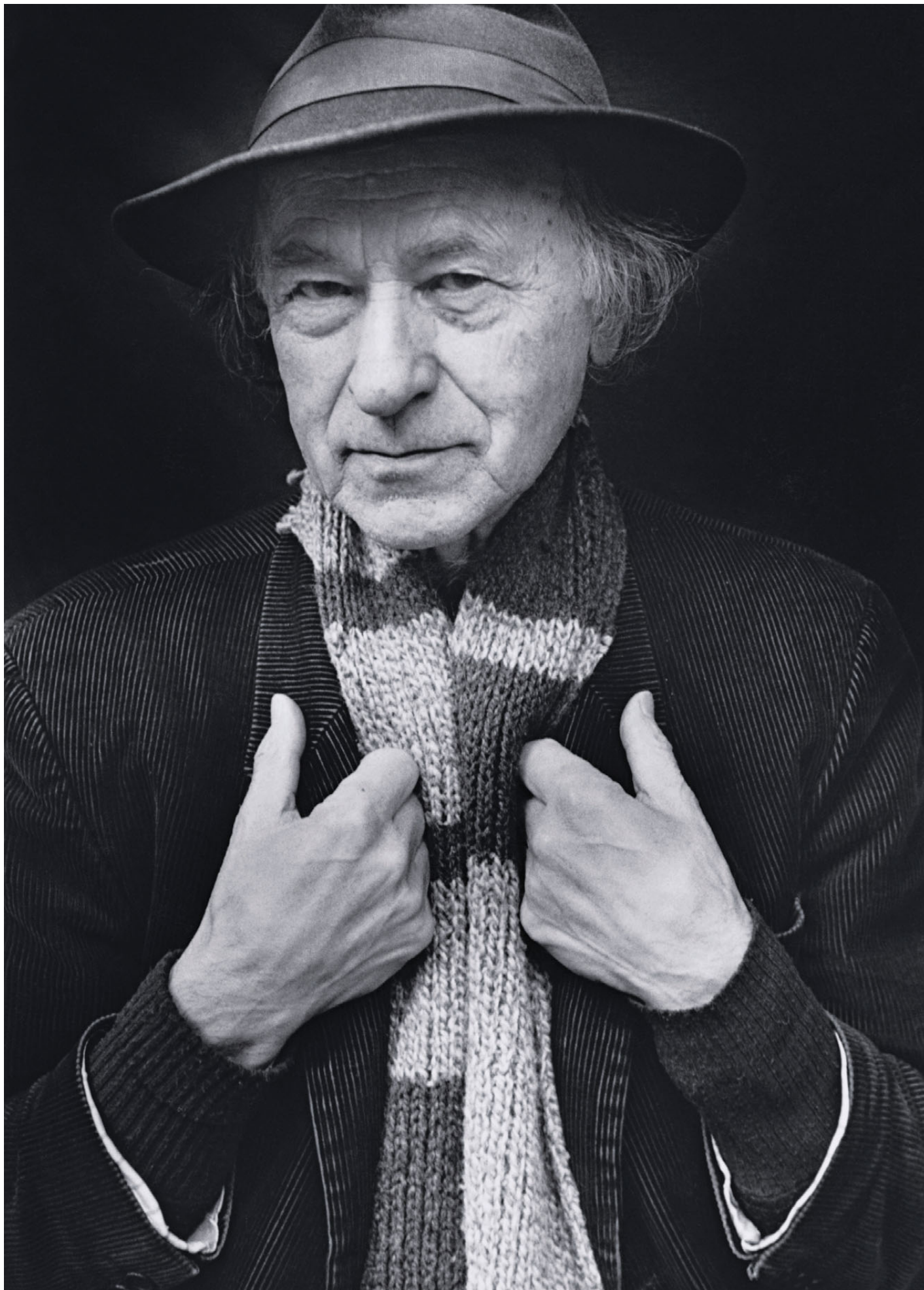
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PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER FELLERCOINIS

Ninety this month, the great Jonas Mekas is the godfather of avant-garde film, as maker of his own works and facilitator of other people's

By Amy Taubin plus overleaf **Jim Jarmusch, Peter Kubelka, Ken Jacobs, Chantal Akerman** and **Malcolm Le Grice**

It is 24 December 1967 and I am standing in the lobby of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, located in the basement of an office building on 41st Street, just east of that tawdry treasure of New York City, the Times Square movie strip. More than 200 filmmakers, artists, writers, musicians and lay friends of Jonas Mekas have assembled to celebrate the 45th birthday of the godfather of avant-garde film (a designation not yet coined, but already appropriate). The party, financed with contributions from almost everyone present, has been organised by Barbara Rubin (the maker of the extraordinary *Christmas on Earth*, shot in 1963, when she was still in her teens, with a 16mm Bolex that Jonas had lent her), Barbara's best friend Rosebud, and me. For the past week, Jonas has been the object of Barbara's and my attention as we schlepped him from one tony Manhattan menswear store to another in search of the perfect suit to replace his ragged corduroy jacket and threadbare pants. Now he is furious that \$45 worth of ice has been



FILM AS LIFE JONAS MEKAS



He documented the city daily, making it his own in his diarist masterpiece 'Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)'

PHYSICAL FILM
16mm frames from 'Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)', above, and 'Lost Lost Lost', below



delivered to the party. Had we not stopped to think that \$45 could pay for three rolls of 16mm film, enough for some filmmaker to realise an eight-minute movie? How could we have asked filmmakers to pay for such nonsense?

But there is worse to come. Faced with creating a birthday cake large enough to feed 200, we have opted to arrange the many small rectangular, square and circular layers we baked into a near life-size image of Jonas, frosted and detailed with vanilla and chocolate pastry crème and laid out on a long, parchment-covered table. It is not until we hand Jonas the knife to cut the first slice that I realise that we have made a totem, to be devoured by the community. Jonas, a superb physical comedian, circles the figure, chuckling as he considers which piece of himself to sacrifice. Should it be the hand that holds his omnipresent Bolex, or one of the feet that carry him about the city that he documents daily and will make his own in his diarist masterpiece *Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)* (1969)? Or would it be better to get it over with quickly by piercing his Pillsbury pound-cake heart? Too cowardly to watch, I never knew where he placed the knife, but I remember that afterwards we laughed, ate cake, drank wine and were reasonably happy that Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve 2012, Jonas Mekas turns 90, double the age he was at that party, and his practice has shifted from mostly godfathering to largely art-making. He has become one of the most accomplished and prolific film and video makers of the movement he nurtured for half a century. Precariously poised between the 'art' film and the visual art world, this economically fragile, surprisingly varied moving-image genre has been dubbed, to no one's satisfaction, the New American Cinema (forgive the chauvinism) or defined by attaching various modifiers – underground, avant-garde, experimental, personal – to the generic term 'movies'.

Nothing could testify more conclusively to Mekas's transformation – from the indispensable guardian, fundraiser, critic, proselytiser, programmer, archivist and founder (or co-founder) of the institutions that formed that movement's infrastructure, to the maker of a body of moving-image work that is at least the equal of those created by the field's legendary artists (Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs, Michael Snow) – than the many exhibitions that have been organised to celebrate the beginning of his tenth decade on earth.

In London, at BFI Southbank, Mark Webber has programmed a series that includes many of Mekas's major films, including the early more or less anomalous *Guns of the Trees* (1962) and *The Brig* (1964); the first and still the most complex of the diaristic works, *Walden*; the most haunting and emotive diaries *Lost Lost Lost* (1976) and *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1973); and a recent diary made on digital video, *Sleepless Nights* (2011). Simultaneously, the Serpentine Gallery is exhibiting a selection of Mekas's installation, photographic, film, video and sound works, along with a "live event", discussions and the premiere of a new film, *Out Takes from the Life of a Happy Man*.

In Paris, meanwhile, at the Pompidou Centre, Pip Chodorov has coordinated a complete retrospective of Mekas's films and videos, and what amounts to a *cata-logue raisonné* of Mekas's moving-image work has been

published by Paris Experimental. ("Every single scrap of film or video that has a title is included," Chodorov claims.) As in the BFI Southbank show, all works produced on film are being projected as film, which of course is the preferred way to view them. Mekas, however, was one of the first avant-garde filmmakers to make his work available for home viewing, initially as crude VHS transfers. Several years ago Chodorov's Re:Voyr produced an elaborate DVD box-set of *Walden*, and now it has collaborated with Agnès B. DVD on a set that includes all the films mentioned above except *Guns of the Trees*. While these are beautifully realised transfers, they are no substitute for the experience of film projection. So seize the opportunity – it may never come again.

NOWHERE TO GO

Born on a farm in Lithuania, Mekas was a published poet before he turned 20 and a wanted man – by the Nazis and later the Soviets, who completed their takeover after the war – for his underground anarchist activities. Forced to flee their homeland in 1944, he and his younger brother Adolfas were captured and sent to a German forced-labour camp. Then followed four years in displaced-persons camps in Germany, where they became fascinated by Hollywood movies and Jonas shot his first images, not with a motion-picture camera but with a variety of still cameras – anything he could get his hands on. These photographs, ephemeral evocations of liminality, have only recently come to light (Mekas is one of history's most dedicated pack rats) and are on view in the Serpentine exhibition.

UN intervention brought the Mekas brothers to New York in 1949. They could not return to the farm until 1971. "We learned later," Mekas told me in an interview, "that they had been camped under the trees with guns, waiting for us." (Hence the title of his bleak 1962 first feature.) *I Had Nowhere to Go* (1991), Mekas's written diary from 1944 through 1955, recounts this first decade of exile and his inchoate determination to make a home in a world of words and images. It also makes evident that the diary will be his form, no matter what the medium.

On arriving in New York, the Mekas brothers tried to write films scripts and Jonas bought a 16mm Bolex, using it to document the daily life of the Lithuanian immigrant community (for the history of this camera and the ones that followed it, see the lovely video *The Story of My Five Bolexes*, posted on the website jonasmekasfilms.com). Drawn to experimental film (he often mentions the profound effect Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* had on him), he began to organise screenings in 1953, which led him to found the peripatetic Film-Makers' Cinematheque, the paramount showcase for avant-garde film until the end of the 1960s. In 1955 he started *Film Culture* magazine, for many years the most serious and provocative film journal in the US, and in 1958 he initiated his enormously influential 'Movie Journal' column in *The Village Voice*. Some 15 years later, when the *Voice* dared to edit one of his columns, he decamped for the *Soho Weekly News*, and when that upstart rag also questioned his 'personal' style of journalism, he recommended me to take over his beat – sealing, for better or worse, my fate for the next 35 years and counting.

As if the responsibility of holding screenings, editing a magazine and writing a column (and raising the funds



for all of them) weren't enough, Mekas also co-founded, in 1961, the Film-Makers' Cooperative, which remains the most active distributor of avant-garde film in the US. And in 1970 he took on what became his heaviest responsibility by co-founding Anthology Film Archives, the premier institution devoted to exhibiting and preserving avant-garde film. So it was astonishing that Mekas also found the time to shape the footage that he shot with seeming casualness – sometimes literally from the hip – into a rich, complex, cinematic autobiography, beginning with *Walden* and followed by some two dozen 16mm works and many, many more made with the video cameras he has used since the end of the 1980s.

Mekas's film poetics sprang in part out of economic necessity. Since film was expensive, he developed a way of shooting in short bursts, sometimes as short as three or four frames (a sixth of a second), before turning off the camera or pointing it elsewhere. Indeed he could have stretched the \$45 Barbara Rudin and I spent on ice into several months of handheld 16mm imagery. Although there are moments in even the fastest-paced sequences where the camera holds on a face, an object, a landscape or an interior for a few seconds, one's impression is of images that are simultaneously present and as elusive as memory; the images are gone before we can fully grasp them.

Like still photographers, Mekas has always attempted to capture the essence of the moment, but for him as a filmmaker, that essence is found in movement – the instantaneous transformation of present into past. That transformation is reinforced by the soundtracks that he constructs at his editing table: first-person associative commentaries mixing remembrances with immediate responses to the images he is viewing and splicing together, and which by definition are all ghosts from the past. ("It's not narration," he says of the soundtracks. "It's just talking.")

Both mournful and celebratory (their emotive power deriving from the naked yearning and sense of loss that's there in Mekas's voice and words even more than in his imagery), the films are intensely personal meditations on

recorded memory. They also comprise a cultural history of New York in the second half of the 20th century, from the point of view of an outsider who was attuned to both the underground and the mainstream. When people ask me what New York was like in the 1960s, I tell them to look at *Walden*, the diaries covering 1965 to 1968. When they ask how the 50s could have morphed into the 60s, I show them *Lost Lost Lost*. Shot between 1949 and 1963, but not edited until 1975, the film bears witness to American culture in transition from the repression of the Eisenhower years to the euphoric rush of the early 60s. It also evidences the development of Mekas's style of filmmaking as a response to the changing times (and also to the enormous influence of the films of Stan Brakhage).

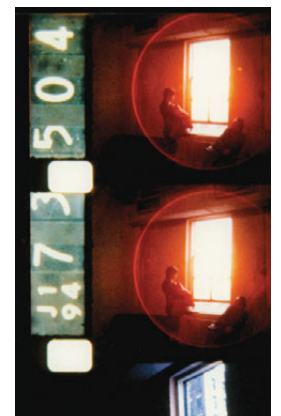
TREMBLING WITH MEMORY

Mekas's last major 16mm film (although who knows what unedited footage he still has on his shelves) is the nearly five-hour *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000). The most intimate and (at least in length) epic of his films, it is almost entirely focused on his domestic life from the mid-1970s to the late 1990s – the period of his marriage to Hollis Melton, which saw the birth of their two children, who by the end of the film have grown into adulthood. Far less abstract than the 'home movies' comprising most of Brakhage's oeuvre, it is also notable for its refusal of sentimentality and for the undertone of melancholy beneath its determinedly optimistic surface. Like all of Mekas's work, from the giddiest to the most despairing, it is shaped by the displaced person's desire to recreate a paradise that has faded – as film fades – with time.

At the end of *I Had Nowhere to Go*, Mekas wrote: "I sat there, by this quiet New England lake, looking across the water, and I almost cried. I saw myself, walking with my mother across the field, my small hand in hers, and the field was burning with red and yellow flowers, and I could feel everything like then and there, every smell and color and the blue of the sky... I was sitting there and trembling with memory."

Happy 90th birthday, Jonas.

GLIMPSES OF BEAUTY
Clockwise from left: 'Guns of the Trees'; 'Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania'; frames from 'As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty'



IRREPRESSIBLE INSPIRATION

Five filmmakers from New York City, Austria, Belgium and the UK share their memories and impressions of Jonas Mekas, his work as filmmaker, distributor and exhibitor – and what it has meant to them

JIM JARMUSCH

Director, 'Stranger Than Paradise', 'Dead Man'

Jonas Mekas is an international treasure – but a very difficult man to categorise. He is a remarkable artist and filmmaker, a poet, a cultural anthropologist, preservationist, curator, visual diarist, literary editor, provocateur – and an irrepressible inspiration.

His influence is also impossible to summarise. I'll just say that for me this man's work, his mind and his invaluable perspective continue to open up and feed my own. For Jonas, forms are fluid and seemingly interchangeable, yet he approaches each one with a particular kind of wonder and enthusiasm. I can only hope that I might carry, to some small degree, his beautiful influence and love of the process of expression in my own mind, work and perspectives.

PETER KUBELKA

Filmmaker and co-founder, Anthology Film Archives

Jonas and I met for the first time in 1963. We lived in opposite corners of the Western world and we both had a very complicated situation vis-à-vis our chosen medium, film. America was practically under the dictatorship of the industry – Hollywood and the unions, who would not tolerate independent cinema (by the way, this word did not exist at the time) – and there was no place for us. I was in Austria. There was a low level of information about cinema.

Between us there was the liberal French *nouvelle vague*, which both Jonas and I did not like. These people were bought up by producers who would say, "You can make what you want, but make it 90 minutes with a beautiful girl in the lead and music – something we can sell." We had other things in mind. We wanted to use cinema as a ship like Columbus to go to a country where we had not been before, and we did not care about the Sunday-afternoon families who the films would have to be sold to.

In 1966, with the help of Jonas and Stan Brakhage, I went to America. By then we had both started to show films. I had co-founded the Vienna Film Museum in 1964 and Jonas had already started the Film-Makers' Cooperative. We both wanted those films which are important to be seen by the public. Between us we showed Leni Riefenstahl, Dovzhenko, Jack Smith... I was called a fascist here in Austria because I showed a fascist film. But I didn't show it because it was my worldview – I



THE WIND-UP CHRONICLES Jonas Mekas with his ever-present Bolex at the ready

showed it because it is an important film. Jonas showed Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures*, in New York in 1964] and was arrested for that [on obscenity charges]. He fought for the freedom of expression – the freedom of art.

We were both interested in establishing film as a fully acceptable artform, not as a 19th-century melodrama with a script and actors and background music, as it is still practised by commercial cinema.

I believe in circles in the development of art – multi-renaissances. There's always a renewal. You could call Jonas a renaissance man with a camera. Dziga Vertov was the man with the 35mm camera; Jonas came along and adopted the 16mm Bolex, a tool which was much lighter and cheaper (but today would be judged a very heavy piece of equipment). It enabled him to work without a script, without a preconceived subject. Jonas had a bag and the Bolex was always inside. And when he felt like it – which was several times every day – he took it out and was able to record a part of reality that happened around him in a way which nobody had been able to present before.

Of course, cinema's smallest element is the single frame, and Jonas used the Bolex's ability for easily shooting single frames. He used it like an architect uses bricks to build a visual

form in time. He discovered what others who tried to imitate 35mm high perfection with the Bolex had not found.

KEN JACOBS

Filmmaker, 'Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son'

Jonas's *Village Voice* column could make us crazy, and yet only he was insisting that this improper *personal* cinema be attended to – and this during the cine-trough (with precious few exceptions) of the politically intimidated 1950s and early 60s. "Come on, sixties," he was shouting, like Clark Gable calling Buck in *The Call of the Wild*. "You can do it!"

His many films are all over the place – self-indulgence is their claim, sometimes with music I can't stand. Yet what's the crime? Feeling too much? There are astounding pieces only he would think of making, like the filmed video screens recounting the release of Lithuania from what was supposed to be communism. Offend my sensibilities, Jonas – big deal!

OK, raw enthusiasm is no virtue in itself, but we've found compelling his awful squawking on the horn, his squeezebox ministrations, his singing badly in six languages. Enthusiasts do those things. Film form film form film form! can be a hang-up. Wasn't the lens open, letting light in – and all those living people? They

made it through and onto film, onto videotape, onto a memory card. (Memory card is a sweet name.) The fact is, this fellow knows where he's been throughout his many days – this very conscious man with his orderly records and endless note-taking, a poet straddling languages with the sense to appeal for money to those who have it.

I still learn from a mind-bending comment he once made: “No one is poor.” This from a person to a person familiar with eating garbage. My partner Flo says he added the words “given language”.

His admirable drinking. I sometimes remember to try loosening up, but you're either of peasant stock or you're not, with roots deep into the earth.

He was physically brave after the *Flaming Creatures* arrests when, in the station house, the police threatened us “commie fags” and he wouldn't stop telling them what fools they were, their authority visibly sagging. I'd seen the same protective cover form around Jack Smith in the streets when his own otherness put threatening people off. A week later Jonas alone publicly screened *Un chant d'amour* in order to join our case with that of the famous Jean Genet, this time prepared for jail with Flo's first roast chicken.

And then he went on to found New York's Anthology Film Archives, cinema mission house. Whatever his mistakes – like defining a single essential cinema – cinema owes him.

I like his letting his 90 years hang out – the less-than-dainty skin and weathered neck. Yet even now one can see Jonas in his prime come through, the jaunty dude saying “Yes” to the world. “Go on, happen!”

CHANTAL AKERMAN

Director, 'Jeanne Dielman', 'The Captive'

That period when I was in New York, close to the Anthology [Film Archives], gave me an immense sense of freedom and openness. For me it is difficult to talk about Jonas without speaking about the atmosphere, the group who was around him: dancers and painters and theatre people like Richard Foreman. It was a new world, a new way at looking.

I arrived in New York when I was 21. Babette Mangolte introduced me to all these people – it was a revelation and indeed brought me to another space, another kind of viewing art, cinema and so on. Jonas was a kind of centre, not only because he had the Anthology, but by his attitude. I remember coming to show him my first film *Saute ma ville*, and how encouraging he was.

MALCOLM LE GRICE

Filmmaker, 'Castle 1', 'Berlin Horse'

Maybe an organisation for experimental filmmakers would have emerged in London in the late 1960s, but without Jonas Mekas I doubt it



HOME MOVIE Mekas filmed his 1996 manifesto 'Cinema Is Not 100 Years Old' in his Broadway loft

would have been a co-op. Though there had been mutual societies from the earliest time of American independence, and even co-operatives during the 1930s recession, creating the Film-Makers' Cooperative in the anti-socialist USA of the 1960s was truly radical.

If Mekas was not the sole architect of this idea, it was his tremendous commitment and practical drive that set the historical movement in motion, kept it developing and spread its enthusiasm internationally. His lack of self-seeking ego and his understanding of a responsibility to the social were exceptional and crucial. His dedication to open access and lack of censorship, embodied in the constitution of the New York Coop, was adopted as cen-

tral to the philosophy of the London Film-Makers' Co-op.

Mekas has always been massively supportive of other film artists both in the USA and abroad, through his writing – particularly in *The Village Voice* – and a regular NY radio slot. I experienced his in-depth but relaxed style when he interviewed me live on air during my first visit to New York. He promoted work he saw in European festivals in London and elsewhere. His enthusiasm for films has never been bounded by his own work as a supreme diarist and chronicler, recorded through his ever-present camera.

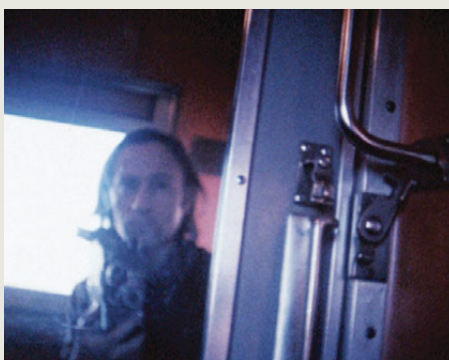
Despite his driving commitment, Mekas is no ideologue – he has a wicked sense of humour. When, in 1977, I had the nerve to confront the urbane, learned and witty film historian P. Adams Sitney in a public debate at New York's Millennium Film Workshop, Jonas appeared and placed a bottle of Fundador brandy on the small table between us, which we finished to the last drop during the debate. Jonas was wise enough not to take the theoretical substance of our debate too seriously – and did his best to see that we did likewise.

If he has any interest in theory, it is not a theory about film's form or content but about the social context of film production and viewing – he has fought with tenacity and great generosity to maintain an open, uncensored pluralism. Film history would have been much the poorer without him.



A Jonas Mekas retrospective plays at BFI Southbank, London until 26 January, in tandem with an exhibition at Serpentine Gallery

Dziga Vertov was the man with the 35mm camera; Jonas adopted the 16mm Bolex, a tool that was much cheaper



Mekas in 'Walden (Diaries, Notes and Sketches)'

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

It's often been dismissed as schlock horror or camp indulgence, but the 50th-anniversary rerelease of Robert Aldrich's 'What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?' gives us a chance to reassess one of cinema's most unconventional and challenging presentations of womanhood

By Hannah McGill

A child is weeping, scared by a jack-in-the-box on a carnival booth. It's not a whimper of shock, either, but the sort of deep, hiccupy crying that sounds like it's been going on for a while. "Want to see it again, little girl?" prompts the unseen stallholder. "It shouldn't frighten you." Without her assent he makes it spring out again, whereupon the camera closes in on its static, grinning face, the lifeless eyes of which then themselves produce tears. The girl is patted – but not held or comforted – by her mother or nanny; she doesn't hide her eyes in the woman's early-20th century skirts, but keeps looking at the nasty clown. In fact, she doesn't seem scared so much as deeply miserable.

The unpleasant back-to-frontness of this opening sequence – the item constructed for pleasure that instead provokes misery; the adult who goads an unhappy child to further upset; the mother who doesn't intervene to protect; the child who doesn't turn away from something horrible but seems driven to absorb it – sets the tone for *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, a film in which notions of childhood innocence, familial nurturing and even simple entertainment are distorted, fairground-mirror style. Like the image in such a mirror, like clown make-up that deforms features and conveys sadness and happiness at once, Robert Aldrich's 1962 film spurns conventional pleasures, and instead offers us weird caricatures thereof.

Based on Henry Farrell's 1960 novel, *Baby Jane* goes even further than Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd* (1950) in throwing Hollywood's leftovers back in its face. Two regal leading ladies of the golden age, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, are seen shockingly depleted, in roles that absorb and overturn their younger personae. Davis, as over-the-hill alumna of the vaudeville theatre Baby Jane Hudson, is a lumpy, ill-made-up pastiche of the flirty dollybird she never quite was in real life; Crawford, as Jane's disabled sister Blanche, gets to be beautiful still, but is playing passive, robbed not only of her famed athleticism but also the forceful sexuality that was the hallmark of her real-life fame. (It's a truism that most movie stars are smaller in the flesh than they seem on screen, but it's still a shock to note that the seemingly statuesque Crawford was only 5'4", and Davis a shade smaller.)

In one of its many sly in-jokes on its stars' careers, *Baby*

Jane? shorthands its characters' grown-up screen work by showing a couple of execs viewing footage of both sisters as nubile twentysomethings, and discussing their respective talents. Davis/Jane – seen striving for vampiness in two 1933 releases, Alfred E. Green's *Parachute Jumper* and Robert Florey's *Ex-Lady* – is painful for them to watch: "Boy oh boy oh boy... she's got a Southern accent like I've got a Southern accent," grumbles Bert Freed's unimpressed exec. Crawford/Blanche – glimpsed in startling pre-Code near-nudity in Clarence Brown's *Sadie McKee* (1934) – is presented not only as the superstar ("the biggest thing in pictures", says the other exec, played by Wesley Addy) but also as the finer actress. It's a reversal of the conventional wisdom on the two actresses, which follows George Cukor's quote: "Joan envied Bette's incredible talent, and Bette envied Joan's seductive glamour." That supposed tension – real or constructed – fed rivalry between the two stars at the height of their fame, and stoked the freaky energy of their shared comeback in Aldrich's film.

Want to see it again? Well, Glasgow's Park Circus is giving the film its second rerelease (having dusted it off before in 2004), to mark its 50th anniversary. *It shouldn't frighten you.* Or should it? And if so, from whence issues the fear? Still customarily classed as a horror, and frequently as a proto-John Waters camp indulgence, Aldrich's oddity now seems replete with interesting resonances, and rather less jokey than its reputation might suggest. As to horror, it's strikingly tame: the film's grotesqueries are born not of gore, but of its wholesale rejection of conventional screen presentations of womanhood and femininity. Sex isn't there, except in Crawford's brief *Sadie McKee* shimmy: Jane's self-image has stalled at prepubescence and Blanche – early lushness faded and lower parts unusable – is a pious goody-goody whose fan-mail comes not from male suitors but from loving housewives who regard her as "an old friend". Jane Hudson has clear antecedents in *A Streetcar Named Desire*'s burnt-out belle Blanche DuBois and *Great Expectations*' witchy jilted Miss Havisham; but both of those deathless spinsters lose it thanks to male neglect (gay husband and fled fiancé respectively). Jane Hudson's bitterness, arrested sexuality and supercharged sibling rivalry, by contrast, are all about her work.

TALONS WILL OUT

In 'What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?' Joan Crawford, seated, and Bette Davis are seen shockingly depleted in roles that absorb and overturn their younger personae



From the film's 1917 opening – when 'Baby Jane' is a substantial theatrical draw and Blanche her sensitive, neglected shadow – we flash past Blanche's rise and Jane's fall in the 1930s, before settling in the early 1960s for the bulk of the narrative. By this point neither Jane nor Blanche has a career, Jane's having failed to survive the leap from stage to screen, or from childhood to adult fame, and Blanche's having stalled when a mysterious car accident confined her to a wheelchair. They live together in a palatial Hollywood mansion, their differing tastes encapsulated by a Modigliani-style print (or maybe it's meant to be an original) on one wall and a tacky painting of a large-eyed child on the other. Jane thinks that the house is hers, purchased by her beloved Daddy with the proceeds of her sickly stage act; as far as Blanche is concerned, it's all hers, part of the spoils of her stardom, and she wants her increasingly troublesome sister out. Each imagines that she is accommodating the other, but each harbours fierce resentments; we know from the opening 1917 segment that Blanche, despite her determined sunniness, has sworn vengeance for her early mistreatment at the hands of Jane and their father.

WOMEN WITHOUT MEN

Many readers will be familiar with the 'Bechdel test', based on an idea from Alison Bechdel's 1985 comic-strip *Dykes to Watch out For*. For those who aren't, Bechdel invented a system for assessing gender balance in narrative in the form of a three-stage test: does the story feature more than one woman? Do the women talk to each other? And if they do, do they talk about anything other than a man or men? Though *Baby Jane?* is hardly seen as a feminist tract (Alexander Walker, in his 1986 book *Bette Davis*, charges it with "misogynist exploitation"), it Bechdel's with flying colours. Even when Jane acquires a gentleman caller, in the form of Victor Buono's middle-aged mama's boy Edwin Flagg, she wants him to accompany her stage revival on the piano, not to be her lover.

Certainly, romance hovers as a sideline possibility in Jane's anticipatory primping and unpractised flirtation, and her fear that her sister will "scare him off – or maybe have him for yourself". But it's her father, svengali of her early career and nakedly partial source of her bitter rivalry with Blanche, whom Jane's trying to replace. Did either sister marry? Did they compete over men, as Crawford and Davis were alleged to have done in real life? Is Jane in fact still virgin? Are both? We don't find out. Somehow a competition birthed in their early years and fostered by Daddy has resolved itself in a codependent cohabitation that recalls the breathtakingly miserable ending of Edith Wharton's novel *Ethan Frome*: crippled babe and hardened spinster marooned with their bitter memories, only here without even a shared love object to buffer them. Maybe it's the absence of a solid male viewpoint (Edwin is a pathetic buffoon) and the focus upon frustrated female ability that cause this film to strike a particular chord with women. Like *Carrie* (1976), *Heathers* (1988) and *Mean Girls* (2004), *Baby Jane?* has a rare radar for the underhand manipulations and suppressed violence of female intimacy.

The supposed real-life rivalry of its stars supplies much of the film's onscreen energy and enduring fame. Studio hype or authentic strife? Shaun Considine, author of the addictive dual memoir *Bette and Joan: The*



Like 'Carrie' and 'Heathers', 'What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?' has a rare radar for the underhand manipulations and suppressed violence of female intimacy

Divine Feud, insists on the latter. Approached by both Davis and Crawford in the early 1970s with claims of the other's treachery, he worked on the book through the 70s and 80s, publishing in 1989; he is now adapting it into a feature script (cast that in your wildest dreams!). "Neither star would relinquish an inch of her well-earned territory," he told me recently. "Bette seemed to be more candid and aggressive, while Joan's counter-attacks were discreet, and deadlier."

Considine rejects the notion, now frequently posited, that the two were in fact coolly professional peers; if anything, he claims, their mutual antipathy was underplayed. "Although their individual personae were constructed for effect, on screen and off... not much of the rivalry or unpleasantness between them went beyond the fortified walls of the powerful Hollywood studios," he says. "There was seldom a discouraging word released on what was actually occurring on the star assembly lines."

Considine's book details antics from the *Baby Jane?* set that seem too drag-queen delicious to be true: Crawford weighing down her dress in order to impede Davis in a scene in which Jane has to lift Blanche; Davis replacing a dead bird with a dead rat on camera just to freak Crawford out; Crawford struggling for glamour, complete with breast padding and manicured nails, even as she embodied a broken-down invalid. Considine insists on the veracity of these macabre tales: "During [my] interviews with their co-workers, the writers, photographers, make-up artists, publicists and others... practically every aspect of *Baby Jane?* was discussed. Hence the confirma-



tion, and more, of the incredible things that happened during the filming and promotion of *Baby Jane?*.”

Considine’s book is a rich marvel of poisonous gossip, and a record of the extraordinary tenacity that powered two women through long, troubled and troublesome careers. And the film itself merits reappraisal, in no small part because of the stylistic clash in the performances. Considine says that Crawford “deliberately underplayed” the role of Blanche, allowing Davis the “tour-de-force performance”. Less generously, you could say Crawford is doing wide-eyed Hollywood-vulnerable, constantly self-aware and managed for maximum sympathy; Davis, by contrast, is rawly alive, unpredictable, funny and seemingly delighted by the opportunity to shed all efforts at attractiveness.

Alexander Walker’s account has Davis weeping on seeing the film at Cannes – “I just look so awful!”, but it’s hard to believe that she could have been surprised, so flagrantly lacking in vanity is her performance. That Davis looks so grisly is one reason why the film tends not to be regarded as especially favourable to its stars. Walker, with his customary elegant turn of phrase and distaste for the distasteful, called it “mordant autobiography... a mortuary autopsy where the ‘body’ is a distorted but recognisable parody of the ‘life’.” But from today’s perspective, *Baby Jane?* seems to allow its women rather more power and (in Davis’s case) wit than Walker noticed – partly because it removes their decorativeness.

The film was a hit and, as Nick Varley of Park Circus observes, part of a new survivalist movement that used

camp appeal to revive flagging iconhood: “As *Sunset Blvd* dealt with the death of the silent screen stars, *Baby Jane?* was the first in a string of movies that showcased once-great Hollywood stars turning to horror and terror to keep their careers alive.”

So effective was the experiment that Aldrich planned a follow-up vehicle for Davis and Crawford, *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, from the same writing team, Henry Farrell and Lukas Heller, about a Southern belle driven mad and murderous by – yes – male rejection. Sadly for posterity, Crawford dropped out after shooting began, and was replaced by Olivia de Havilland – bringing with her a resonance of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) that’s all too appropriate, since Aldrich’s film can be read as a possible future for Scarlett O’Hara should Ashley stay faithful and Rhett continue not to give a damn. Scarlett was, of course, a role that Davis had wanted badly; her bloodied ball dress in *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* references the famous red frock she’d rocked in her consolation project, William Wyler’s *Jezebel* (1938) – as well as foreshadowing Carrie White’s prom night.

The same cinematographer, Ernest Haller, worked on *Gone with the Wind*, *Jezebel* and *Baby Jane?*; he also shot Crawford in one of her best roles, *Mildred Pierce* (1945). Haller’s gorgeous work on the defiantly black-and-white *Baby Jane?* is yet another reason to reassess one of cinema’s most confronting and peculiar paeans to female unfulfilment and domestic unbliss.



‘What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?’ is rereleased in UK cinemas on 14 December 2012

CHILD’S PLAY
Baby Jane Hudson (Bette Davis, opposite, and above, on set in 1962) is trapped in a grotesque re-enactment of her childhood vaudeville act

PAST MASTERS

It may be a coincidence, but the seeming demise of film as we know it has coincided with a poll result that enshrines films that cast their eyes back over the history of cinema

By Nick James

Commentators have been preaching uncertainty as the abiding state of cinema for so long now that we should probably concede that the condition is permanent. Ergo, 2012 was another watershed year, marked out as the moment that the 35mm film print largely disappeared from our cinemas. Which makes *The Master* a truly apoposite film of the year, since part of its uniqueness was the possibility – available in a few cities – of seeing it projected on a 70mm print rather than the new industry standard DCP. That gorgeous period film, brought so vividly to life by Paul Thomas Anderson, might end up being remembered as analogue film projection's last gasp. Unless, that is, the admirable rearguard action being fought by the likes of the Austrian Film Museum (see Forum p.76) provokes a similar niche revival to the one that saw vinyl make a comeback in the music industry. Of course, a small bounce-back for analogue cinema is a more slender hope than the vinyl revival because film projection requires a chain of services – stock and chemicals manufacturers, labs and technicians – that seems near-impossible to sustain without the mass production that studios supplied.

Nonetheless, nostalgia was a dominant theme among the year's critical successes. Miguel Gomes's *Tabu* (2nd), with its paean to early ethnographic and adventure films, seems as obvious a manifestation of this as Peter Strickland's tribute to Italian horror cinema, *Berberian Sound Studio* (=5th). Leos Carax's multi-story idea splurge *Holy Motors* (4th) was equally happy to plunder art cinema's past, just as a different kind of personal iconographic nostalgia accounts for Wes Anderson's elaborate tribute to prepubescent romance, *Moonrise Kingdom* (7th).

Yet it would be wrong to claim that these directors are backward-looking. There is a believable sense in which the difference between present-day films and those made 30, 40, 50 or more years ago has become less important, especially as we consume old films often under better conditions than they were originally seen. The recent Masters of Cinema Blu-ray restoration of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, for instance, is as much a new experience as an old one since it eliminates so many distracting flaws. And the sense that there is vastly more to be rediscovered and, perhaps, plundered or repurposed by new filmmakers is surely a hopeful regenerative sign.

However wonderful watching battered old prints may be, to lament their passing is arguably a more hopeless

form of nostalgia. Far better to celebrate the popularity of restored film – such as the screenings of Hitchcock's silent films in the UK this year. Their success points to cinemagoers having a more direct connection with early cinema. It may be something to do with the immediacy of early film, which matches the immediate way we all use our cameras. The best example of that directness here is Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* (=8th). But as resourceful and inventive as it is, Panahi's film is also eloquent of the frustrations of small digital cameras, as if the meagre resources are part of the restrictions on Panahi's movements, and his triumph is in spite of them.

If *Amour* (3rd), *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* (=8th, and victim of a split vote with last year) and *Beyond the Hills* (=8th) are great examples of regular arthouse cinema, Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (=8th) seems more like an aggressive seizing of anti-cinematic ground, confining itself as it does to the interior of a stretch limo that seems a more unrealistic venue even than its twin in *Holy Motors*. (Yet that seemingly 'fake' interior is simply an update of the back-projection in Hitchcock.)

Leaving the list behind, 2012 was remarkable for several phenomena. British idiosyncrasy came to the fore in Danny Boyle's outstanding opening ceremony for the Olympics, in the new Bond film *Skyfall*, in Ben Wheatley's *Sightseers* and in Strickland's *Berberian*. Cannes had a rare weak year, to the benefit of Berlin, Venice and Toronto, and festivals in general all now suffer from the increased competition that the general policy of expand-or-die imposes. Despite impactful films from Assayas (*Something in the Air*) and Carax (*Holy Motors*), French cinema doesn't seem to be nurturing new talent very well, while Chinese, Japanese and Korean cinema are either in the doldrums or being wilfully neglected by international festivals and distributors.

Perhaps the biggest impact of all on cinema is that of social media. The speed with which word gets out from the earliest screenings is playing hell with the ecosystem of film distribution, yet it is also nurturing a new mode of cinema commentary. At Cannes, for instance, a writer's most effective impact on the future of a film may be made in 140 characters, the minute the film is over. A sobering thought, but we skate on, however thin the ice.



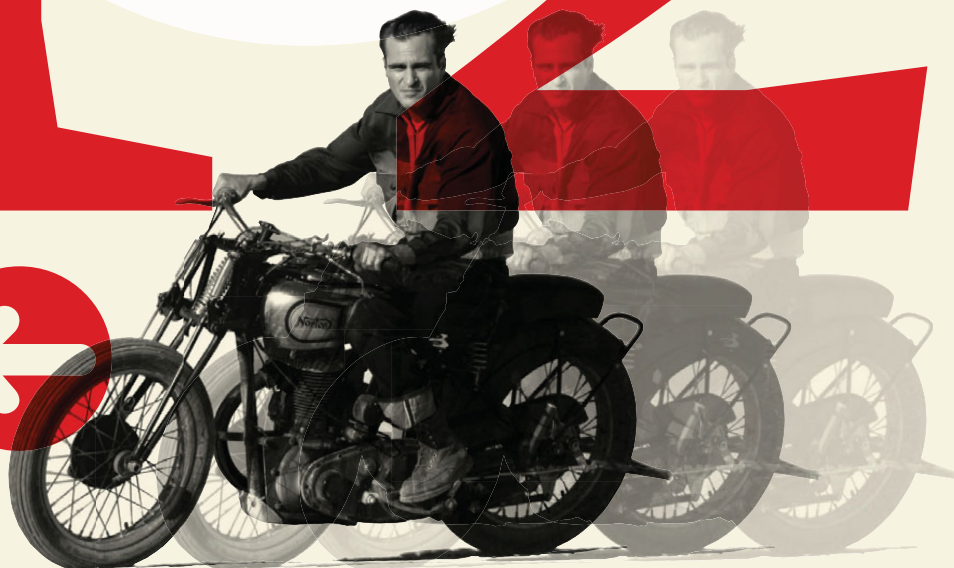
Separate polls of the year's best DVDs and web videos will be published during the holiday season at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound





2012 Top 11

- 1 **The Master**
(Paul Thomas Anderson, USA)
- 2 **Tabu**
(Miguel Gomes, Portugal/Germany/France)
- 3 **Amour**
(Michael Haneke, France/Germany/Austria)
- 4 **Holy Motors**
(Leos Carax, France/Germany)
- 5 **Beasts of the Southern Wild**
(Benh Zeitlin, USA)
- = **Berberian Sound Studio**
(Peter Strickland, UK/Germany)
- 7 **Moonrise Kingdom**
(Wes Anderson, USA)
- 8 **Beyond the Hills**
(Cristian Mungiu, Romania/France/Belgium)
- = **Cosmopolis**
(David Cronenberg, Canada/France/Portugal/Italy)
- = **Once upon a Time in Anatolia**
(Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey/Bosnia & Herzegovina)
- = **This Is Not a Film**
(Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmaseh, Iran)



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Please note: below are 50 critics' lists of their highlights of 2012, out of over 90 responses on which the poll on the previous page is based. The remaining lists and highlights will be posted online in December

MELISSA ANDERSON

Critic, USA

Barbara (Christian Petzold, Germany)

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

Magic Mike (Steven Soderbergh, USA)

Neighbouring Sounds (O Som ao Redor) (Kleber Mendonça Filho, Brazil)

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

GEOFF ANDREW

Head of film programme, BFI Southbank, UK

Five favourite new films (all of them, quite by accident, to do with love):

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Haneke's magisterial meditation on mortality, loss and love benefits from pitch-perfect performances. Unflinchingly honest, terribly tender and enormously moving.

Like Someone in Love (Abbas Kiarostami, France/Japan)

That first word of the title tells all about Kiarostami's playful yet profound Japanese film – a wise, witty series of sentimental journeys undertaken (probably) in the conditional mood.

Everybody in Our Family (Toata Lumea din Familia Nostra)

(Radu Jude, Romania/Netherlands)

Jude's impressive follow-up to *The Happiest Girl in the World* is a rollercoaster tragicomedy about parental love and (ex-) marital distrust going frighteningly awry.

What Is Love (Ruth Mader, Austria)

Mader's second feature (coming nine years after *Struggle*) is a quietly wonderful quasi-documentary contemplation of the varieties of love; for once sex barely comes into it.

Silence (Pat Collins, Ireland/Germany)

Also quasi-documentary, Collins's feature debut about an Irish sound engineer seeking locations free from man-made sound is finally a touching love-letter to the notion of home.

Highlights: The best Berlinale I've yet attended (besides the Jude and

Mader films, it boasted *Caesar Must Die*, *Tabu*, *Sister*, *The Last Friday*, *Avalon* and *Just the Wind*); the Dreyer season at BFI Southbank; the Jean Grémillon retrospective and the restored longer version of *Once upon a Time in America* at Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato festival; hosting an illuminating onstage interview with Abbas Kiarostami at the Morelia Film Festival; and finally the release on DVD of Víctor Erice's *La Morte Rouge* and the news that he has been behind the camera again, directing an episode for the compilation film *Histórias do cinema*.

MICHAEL ATKINSON

Critic, USA

The Turin Horse (A Torinói ló)

(Béla Tarr, Hungary/Switzerland/Germany/France/USA)

Post Mortem (Pablo Larraín, Chile/Germany/Mexico)

Once upon a Time in Anatolia (Nuri Bilge Ceylan)

Alps (Alpis) (Yorgos Lanthimos, Greece)

Almayer's Folly (La Folie Almayer) (Chantal Akerman, Belgium/France)

CAMERON BAILEY

Artistic director, Toronto International Film Festival, Canada

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

The most persuasive filmmaking I saw all year.

Camp 14: Total Control Zone (Marc Wiese, Germany/South Korea)

For its simple testimony of unimaginable horror, this is the one film from 2012 I'd urge everyone to see.

The Place Beyond the Pines (Derek Cianfrance, USA)

Audacious storytelling of the kind that dares an audience to stay with it. After *Blue Valentine*, Cianfrance proves the purity of his filmmaking. **Ship of Theseus** (Anand Gandhi, India)

independent filmmaking is finally getting noticed around the world. Gandhi knows how to ask interesting questions purely through film language. **The Reluctant Fundamentalist** (Mira Nair, USA/India/Turkey/Pakistan)

Making a globe-trotting political thriller with substance has got to be one of the hardest things in cinema to do – the failures are so evident and so common. Nair pulls it off with an adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's novel that's both frequently exhilarating. Much of that is down to Riz Ahmed, who is terrific.

PETER BRADSHAW

'The Guardian', UK

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

See caption page 60.

Amour (Michael Haneke)

An unbearably painful, intimate drama about life's end, perhaps in some ways more human and more lenient than his earlier work, but with that icy and uncompromising exactitude.

Stories We Tell (Sarah Polley, Canada)

After her bizarrely written relationship drama *Take This Waltz*, I almost despaired of Sarah Polley. But then she gave us this wonderful, personal documentary about her parents, a jewel at this year's Venice Film Festival.

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

A cinephile's delight and, more importantly, a cinemagoer's delight. Carax returned this year with this sensual, surreal odyssey about M. Oscar, an existential master of disguise who tours Paris in his stretch limo, inhabiting numberless personae.

This Is Not a Film (Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmasb)

Highlight: Going to BFI Southbank for its 60th anniversary to see the Queen greet its various officials, and also to watch a 1953 3D film called *Royal Review*, all about her duties – and realise that her life has continued in that vein, uninterrupted, from that day to this.

NICOLE BRENEZ

Critic, France

Natpwe – Feast of the Spirit (Tiane Doan na Champassak & Jean Dubrel,

France/Burma, 2003 – released in 2012)

Three Sisters (Wang Bing, China)

Jajouka, quelque chose de bon vient vers toi (Eric & Marc Hurtado, France/Morocco)

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel, France/UK/USA)

Our Body Is a Weapon: Prison (Clarisse Hahn, France)

Highlights: *Actua 1* (1968) by Philippe Garrel et al, rediscovered at last in a lab. DocLisboa 2012 – a magnificent edition of the festival under four new directors: Susana de Sousa Dias, Ana Jordão, Cinta Pelejá and Cíntia Gil.

TOM CHARITY

Critic and program co-ordinator, Vancity Theatre, Canada

The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, Denmark/Norway/UK)

An extraordinary and fascinating film about the amoral lure of cinema itself – and conversely, the magic of its empathy.

Killing Them Softly

(Andrew Dominik, USA)

A *noir* that drug dealers, bankers and businessmen will understand equally well.

Beasts of the Southern Wild (Benh Zeitlin)

Because it represents a poetic escape route from the impasse of indie realism – and because the floods are real.

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel)

A real fish-eye view of deep-sea trawling. It's purgatorial and exhilarating at the same time, with images we've never seen before.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Highlight: Catching up with *Searching for Sugar Man* some two months after it opened and falling in love with Rodriguez's sound, his songs and his dignity. It's still showing in Vancouver after 11 weeks, and I'm still bumping into people who just discovered it. There's something very heartening about this reaffirmation of cinema as communal experience – the mythic sleeper hit that hardly ever happens any more. On top of which it's a beautifully structured piece of storytelling.

IAN CHRISTIE

Critic and film historian, Birkbeck, University of London

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Haneke's tender yet unflinching journey into the twilight of a couple's old age was the film that called some of Cannes's sillier displays of mindless violence to order.

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Another film that starts out with old age, as an elderly Portuguese woman reaches into her past in Africa, leading us into a bittersweet romance and an astonishing black-and-white silent film that manages to avoid pastiche while genuinely reinventing the language of Murnau and Flaherty. **Shame** (Steve McQueen, UK/Canada)

McQueen's second feature opened early in 2012 and won wide respect, even if grudgingly in some quarters. Michael Fassbender's character is certainly embarrassing and repellent in roughly equal measure, but director and actor have conspired to make him someone we go on caring about, as he wreaks emotional havoc in this sad story for our self-obsessed times. **We Went to War** (Michael Grigsby, UK)

Forty years after Grigsby went to Texas to discover how young



=8 This Is Not a Film *A sketch for an imagined film, an essay on both the nature of reality and the ever-expanding properties of lo-fi digital cinema, this is a funny and moving portrait of the artist as prisoner of conscience.* Sophie Mayer



=8 Once upon a Time in Anatolia *Like a nod to Yilmaz Güney's 1982 classic 'Yol', Nuri Bilge Ceylan's film takes on the multilayers of Turkish life in an epic road movie. Perfect cinema, for me.* Suzy Gillett



=8 Cosmopolis *David Cronenberg's sleek adaptation of Don DeLillo's urban road movie, as elegant, cool and rebarbative as the stretch limo Robert Pattinson's antihero travels in.* Philip French

Vietnam vets were coping, in the groundbreaking Granada doc *I Was a Soldier*, he returned with producer Rebekah Tolley to pick up the threads of their subsequent lives. The result is as stunningly eloquent for its silences and empty spaces as for anything said, leaving us to contemplate the long-term cost of war.

Avengers Assemble (aka The Avengers) (Joss Whedon, USA)

Strangely, I saw Joss Whedon's exuberantly enjoyable gathering of the Marvel clan – also one of the best 3D movies in an otherwise poor year – immediately after catching Alan Sekula and Noel Burch's austere analytical *The Forgotten Space* (2010) at Tate Modern. Sekula and Burch chart the impact of globalisation on ports and factory towns, and ultimately on all of us, with impressive skill and visual flair – qualities equally in evidence in Whedon's destruction derby. Instead of Nolan's *Dark Knight* pathos, Whedon manages to recreate the pulp humour and sheer absurdity of Jack Kirby's oddball crew.

Highlights: 2012 saw the rollout of a second great Powell-Pressburger digital restoration, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, from festivals to cinemas and finally DVD. As with *The Red Shoes*, we actually see more in the restored image, but the major gain here is to realise what a groundbreaking use of Technicolor this was in 1943, with a different colour palette for each sequence. The sheer quality of Georges Périnal's cinematography, combined with Alfred Junge's art direction, is staggering in this restoration – like scraping the varnish overlay from a much-loved picture to see what craft and imagination was there all along. Another highlight was the opening show in July at Tate Modern's Tanks, which used this cavernous space to display some expanded-cinema classics to spectacular effect.

MICHEL CIMENT

Editor, 'Positif', France

Dormant Beauty

(*Bella addormentata*)

(Marco Bellocchio, Italy/France)

The best active Italian filmmaker, as lucid as ever (and still refusing any Manichaeism), delivers a modern tale where politics and psychoanalysis are interwoven in a drama about pro-life and euthanasia, inspired by a real case.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

A real master of American cinema gives an epic scope to the confrontation between a soldier bruised by his experience of WWII and a sect guru who vainly tries to cure him.

Mud (Jeff Nichols, USA)

After *Shotgun Stories* and *Take Shelter*, the confirmation of the most brilliant American director of his generation. A rite of passage for two children

confronted in a pastoral landscape with the brutal reality of life.

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

So many good films are not very original – and so many original films are not so good – that it's a pleasure to discover a film, under the shadow of Murnau, that brilliantly mixes realism and fantasy

You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet (Vous n'avez encore rien vu) (Alain

Resnais, France/Germany)

Refusing to be embalmed, Resnais at 90 still provokes controversies in his latest opus: a paean to actors, a meditation on death, a dialogue between the stage and the screen.

Highlight: In Cannes, a one-hour meeting with Norman Lloyd – writer, actor, director – and his extraordinary memories of Welles, Hitchcock, Kazan, Losey, Renoir, Chaplin, Kubrick, Brecht et al.

MARK COUSINS

Critic and filmmaker, UK

Sofia's Last Ambulance

(*Poslednata lineika na Sofia*)

(Ilian Metev, Croatia/Bulgaria/Germany)

A film about a Bulgarian ambulance team in which – brilliantly – we see only their faces, not their patients.

Hadewijch (Bruno Dumont,

France/Germany)

Dumont's beautiful tale of a girl's feelings about sex and god, which would make a fantastic double bill with *Black Narcissus*.

Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present (Matthew Akers, USA)

In a city where people hardly hold each other's glances, Marina Abramovic stares at others for a month. One of the most moving films I've ever seen.

Killing Them Softly (Andrew Dominik)

Once again Andrew Dominik marries Billy Bitzer imagery with a love of male faces.

Florentina Hubaldo, CTE

(Lav Diaz, Philippines)

My discovery of the year: a hypnotic landscape painting, Filipino cinema leading the way.

Highlights: As I make the list, I'm daunted. A film fact-finding trip to Albania (see Rushes); walking along the street singing 'Man or Muppet' after seeing *The Muppet Movie*; visiting the Cineteca Bologna and seeing their Pasolini collection; spending time with Michael Moore at his Traverse City Film Festival; remaking Georges Méliès films with a hundred eight-and-a-half-year-old children and Tilda Swinton; screening *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in Beijing; showing my new film *What Is This Film Called Love* at Karlovy Vary, in a cinema so hot that some people were semi-naked; sitting in the sound booth with Ewen Bremner as he brilliantly recorded voice for the



film; editing with Timo Langer, to P.J. Harvey's great music; walking around Hong Kong, filming; having a sandwich with Anand Patwardhan in a pub in Sheffield; Thierry Frémaux's introduction to *The Story of Film* in Lyon; getting to know Ulrich Seidl's actress Margarete Tiesel at the Telluride Film Festival; and the realm of the senses that is YouTube.

MARIA DELGADO

Academic & critic, UK

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

A love story of epic proportions: elegant, glacial and supremely sensual.

After Lucia (Después de Lucía)

(Michel Franco, Mexico/France)

A devastating portrait of bullying, rooted in two outstanding performances.

Blancanieves (Pablo Berger, Spain)

The Grimm Brothers tale re-envisioned as silent cinema. A wicked stepmother, a spirited bullfighting heroine, a playful reworking of Spanish iconography and a lush score by Alfonso Vilallonga. Classy, entertaining filmmaking from the maker of *Torremolinos 73*.

No (Pablo Larraín, Chile/USA/Mexico)

The politics of marketing and the marketing of politics come under Larraín's scalpel in the final instalment of his trilogy on the traumas of Pinochet's Chile. His decision to shoot with a U-matic video camera is inspired, lending the film a retro 1980s look where fiction and footage meld effortlessly to capture the dynamics of the time.

The Ethnographer (El etnógrafo)

(Ulises Rosell, Argentina)

A beautiful documentary about a British ethnographer who now lives with the Wichí community in Northern Argentina. Melding form and content in exemplary fashion, Rosell's film is as unassuming and serene as the Wichí people themselves.

Highlight: Talking about the process of crafting a performance for Almodóvar with Marisa Paredes and Antonia San Juan; reading Ventura Pons's taut, lean script for *Un berenar a Ginebra* (*Afternoon Tea in Geneva*) on the sunny terrace of the filmmaker's home in Cadaqués; watching the poster boys for the new New Argentine Cinema, Esteban Lamothe and Esteban Bigliardi, in actress and writer Romila Paula's dazzling reworking of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* at one of Buenos Aires's pocket theatres on a warm summer evening; the pleasure of watching sell-out houses enjoy the Argentine Film Festival at Brixton's Ritzy Cinema; reading Almodóvar's magical reflections on the films that live and breathe inside his own cinema as a preparation for his 2012 BAFTA David Lean lecture; the gruelling brilliance of *Amour*'s final moments.

PHILIP FRENCH

'The Observer', UK

Once upon a Time in Anatolia

(Nuri Bilge Ceylan)

Ceylan renews the classic European cinema of the 1960s across the Bosphorus.

Berberian Sound Studio

(Peter Strickland)

The British film of the year, as remarkable as *The Conversation* in its examination of sound.

This Is Not a Film (Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmasb)

Panahi's defiant slice of ironic autobiography emphatically justifies cinema as a challenge to a complacent authoritarian regime.

Moonrise Kingdom (Wes Anderson)

Anderson's magical fable is his wittiest, most generous attempt to define the American Dream.

Cosmopolis (David Cronenberg)

See caption page 53.

Highlight: The vast silhouette of Alfred Hitchcock loomed over the year: the BFI Southbank's three-part season, the newly struck copies, and the apotheosis of the Master with *Vertigo* voted the greatest film of all time in the latest *Sight & Sound* poll. The most important rediscovery, perhaps, was the revival on DVD and in the cinema of Robert Hamer's acutely shaped slice of British realism *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947). It made us reconsider the meaning of Ealing Studios, and recognise the versatility of the great cinematographer Douglas Slocombe, still alive at 99.

The year's most original film books were about Tarkovsky: Geoff Dyer's slim *Zona* (Canongate), a personal monograph about Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, and the monumental *Tarkovsky: Films, Stills, Polaroids & Writings*, edited by Andrey A. Tarkovsky, Hans-Joachim Schlegel and Lothar Schirmer (Thames & Hudson).

JEAN-MICHEL FRODON

Critic, France

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

Laurence Anyways (Xavier Dolan, Canada/France)

Bold and emotional, unpredictable and perfectly true to its characters

and their motivations, supported by extraordinary acting.

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel)

If the word 'groundbreaking' ever meant something, it applies to this reinvention of cinema power to poeticise the relation between men, animals, ocean, sky and the invisible, in a completely revolutionary way.

Saudade (Tomita Tatsuya, Japan)

From the local to the universal, an extraordinarily complex yet easily accessible cinematic translation of the forces that reshape and threaten contemporary societies.

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Poetry and politics, romanticism, infinite love for characters and sharp vision of a self-destructive world.

Five titles only is *dura lex*, excluding

Hong Sangsoo, Olivier Assayas, Brillante Mendoza, David Cronenberg, Abbas Kiarostami, Marco Bellocchio, Benoît Jacquot, Aleksandr Sokurov, Manoel de Oliveira... This (once again) very fruitful year remains doomed by the irremediable loss of Chris Marker.

CHRIS FUJIWARA

Director, Edinburgh International Film Festival, UK

Top five rediscoveries:

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

(Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, 1943, UK)

Presented in its new restoration at the Berlinale, with Thelma Schoonmaker in attendance.

Himala (Ishmael Bernal, 1983, Philippines)

A magnificent work of astounding complexity and control, presented in a restored version at Venice.

Western Union (Fritz Lang, 1941, USA)

An ignored work vindicated in a stunning print screened in the Austrian Filmmuseum's Fritz Lang retrospective.

Typhoon Club (Taifû kurabu)

(Somai Shinji, 1985, Japan)

A masterpiece, presented first at Tokyo FILMeX, then at Edinburgh.

Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell (Terence Fisher, 1973, UK)

The melancholy and brilliant last film of Terence Fisher, rediscovered

at Jeonju – to the great joy of a distinguished multinational cadre of filmmakers and cinephiles.

GRAHAM FULLER

Critic, USA

The Deep Blue Sea (Terence Davies, UK)

Except for *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, it's hard to think of another film in which the masochistic misery of unrequited love is rendered as exquisitely as it is in Davies's Terence Rattigan adaptation, which loves its suicidal heroine even if her feckless younger lover does not. Rarely has Britain's Age of Austerity been so boldly vivified.

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

Despite being filmed digitally, Carax's role-playing fantasy – as romantic as it is sardonic – is a cineaste's heartfelt lament for film as a lost ideal.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

See caption page 58.

The Turin Horse (Béla Tarr)

Tarr's swansong is a relentlessly sombre deconstruction of the father, daughter and eponymous nag's humble ecosystem, culminating in the woman's loss of will to survive and the disappearance of the light. Invoking apocalypse – albeit of the whimper rather than the bang variety – the film is a bleak analogue to Tarr's more narratively complex and imagistic *Werckmeister Harmonies*.

Highlights: In New York, the Lincoln Center's Aleksei German retrospective led me to the tender, rueful *Twenty Days Without War* and the surreal and breathless *Khrustalyov, My Car!*. *It Always Rains on Sunday* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, both rereleased, impressed me as persuasive forebears of kitchen-sink realism.

Best DVD: *Jean Grémillon During the Occupation* (Criterion Eclipse): three great dramas starring Madeleine Renaud that made me question poetic realism's morbidity.

RYAN GILBEY

'New Statesman', UK

Nostalgia for the Light (Nostalgie de la lumière)

(Patricio Guzmán, France/Germany/Chile/USA)



Blancanieves



No

On the Road (Walter Salles, France/UK/Brazil/USA/Canada)

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Beauty (Skoonehead) (Oliver Hermanus, South Africa/France/Germany)

Elena (Andrei Zvyagintsev, Russia/France/USA/Japan)

Highlights: My highlights of the year involve two very different heroes, one living, one long dead. The former is Jean-Claude Carrière, with whom I was privileged to spend an afternoon this summer. His wisdom is matched only by the playfulness with which he carries it. I also attended the world premiere of *Dark Blood*, River Phoenix's last (unfinished) movie, at the Netherlands Film Festival in Utrecht. As a former teenage fan of the actor (I still remember being floored by news of his death when it flashed up, in those pre-internet days, on Teletext), I never thought the day would come. Adroitly rescued and poignantly narrated by its director George Sluizer, *Dark Blood* reminds us of the breadth and uniqueness of Phoenix's talent. Stragglers unmoved by the film itself would surely have been overcome by the speech afterwards from Sluizer, himself frail and gravely ill.

SUZIE GILLET

Head of Projects, London Film School, UK

Once upon a Time in Anatolia

(Nuri Bilge Ceylan)

See caption page 53.

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Beyond the Hills (Cristian Mungiu)

More intimate and less formal than *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days*, Mungiu's latest ends on of the most beautiful focus pulls in film, after transporting us to a Bruegel-like landscape for the winter.

Tey (Aujourd'hui) (Alain

Gomis, France/Senegal)

Following the last day of a Dakar man played by US slam poet Saul Williams, *Tey* blew me away. It's totally hypnotic and – like *Amour* – takes us to that universal point of departure, but via a curious and ingenious path.

My Brother the Devil (Sally El Hosaini, UK/Egypt/USA)

One of the most cinematic portrayals of the urban London I recognise and love (with a twist to boot) – from a director who's a first-timer and a woman. Way to go, Sally El Hosaini!

CARMEN GRAY

Film editor, 'Dazed & Confused', UK

Holy Motors (Leo Carax)

Carax's exhilaratingly mad, rapturous reverie on performance and shifting identities shows up in unapologetic ultraviolet the dust on more drably conventional fare.

Bestiaire (Denis Côté, Canada/France)

Feeling more art installation than nature documentary, Côté's smart, effortlessly elegant and non-partisan experiment defamiliarises the



8 Beyond the Hills *The brilliant final scene cemented my faith in Cristian Mungiu's sensitive and searing realisation of this story – based on real events – of a disruptive intruder persecuted by a religious community.* Nick James

zoo and by extension audiences' fascination with staring at the exotic.

Neighbouring Sounds

(Kleber Mendonça Filho)

This socially incisive Brazilian film employs startlingly innovative sound design to contribute to an architecture of paranoia.

Berberian Sound Studio

(Peter Strickland)

See caption page 57.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

This intense, majestic if nihilistic character drama raises highly original questions about the function of comedy in life.

Highlights: The most memorable cinematic event for its sheer beauty of intent was *Sixty Seconds of Solitude in Year Zero*. Down at Tallinn's port in Estonia just before Christmas (so missing last year's poll), an omnibus of minute-long shorts from 60 of the world's directors was screened, then symbolically set alight. Not to be marketed or distributed, the film was a stand against the subordination of the creative impulse to business, and was accompanied by a manifesto from its originators Veiko Ounpuu and Taavi Eelmaa.

Seeing my favourite film *Mirror* in big-screen glory – courtesy of fabulous initiative A Nos Amours – also lingers in my mind.

Another year of thoughtful, quality releases from Second Run DVD included *Tuesday, After Christmas*, a deft, observational portrait of adultery from Romanian director Radu Muntean, which had missed out on UK theatrical release.

J. HOBERMAN

Critic, USA

Haywire (Steven Soderbergh, USA/Ireland)

Man can never escape from himself,

per Goethe. For me, the film-related highlight of 2012 was the loss of the professional status I had enjoyed for more or less the last 33 years reviewing movies for New York's venerable weekly *The Village Voice* – which, for me, was the best job in the world. In that sense, the new release that most impressed me was *Haywire*: the first movie I saw that I was inspired to write on, and knew I would no longer be able to – at least in the manner to which I had become accustomed.

Once upon a Time in Anatolia

(Nuri Bilge Ceylan)

The Turin Horse (Béla Tarr)

For the record, the two movies released in the US last year that I found most impressive were these two totally immersive experiences.

Highlights: Since I'm a weekly reviewer no longer, and thus unbound by prior constraints, I'll add two old movies that I saw during the last calendar year: Werner Schroeter's *The Death of Maria Malibran* (1972), in a fully saturated new 16mm print, and Ivan Pyriev's 1958 adaptation *The Idiot*, an equally florid example of cinema excess, seen at the Bologna Film Festival.

My most intense movie experience was orchestrating the projection piece *Land Passion War of the Dead Christ Worlds* on the big screen at New York's Walter Reade Theater. (Thank you, Gavin Smith!)

WENDY IDE

'The Times', UK

Beasts of the Southern Wild (Benh Zeitlin, USA)

It should be easy to create magic with the medium of cinema, but all too often we're too familiar with the tricks not to see the sleight of hand. But this was spellbinding and beguiling.

Amour (Michael Haneke)

An intelligently dignified portrait of old age. Put simply, a masterpiece.

Argo (Ben Affleck, USA)

Hollywood at its best. Slyly funny and nail-chewingly tense.

Killing Them Softly (Andrew Dominik)

A trawl through the seediest side of the US economy that goes all out on sordid atmosphere and flick-knife sharp observation.

Children of Sarajevo (Djeca)

(Aida Begic, Bosnia & Herzegovina/France/Germany/Turkey)

I'm really excited by Aida Begic, who shows extraordinary promise. Her second feature is bold, confident and confrontational. I can't wait to see what she does next.

Highlights: Secret Cinema's extraordinary *Prometheus* event – the most ambitious they've yet attempted – was a playfully immersive and at times jaw-droppingly impressive attempt to recreate the world of Ridley Scott's movie. I enjoyed it rather more than the film.

At Cannes I approached Anurag Kashyap's five-hour Indian gangster saga *Gangs of Wasseyapur* – screening in Directors' Fortnight – with a bit of a blitz mentality, but staggered out battered, bruised and high on its pummelling energy and scabrous wit. I hope there is a UK distributor bold enough to release it.

NICK JAMES

Editor, 'Sight & Sound', UK

The five films listed below peaked only marginally above a longlist of 16 and I regret the exclusion in this strong year of the next 11: *Barbara*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Caesar Must Die*, *Damsels in Distress*, *In the Fog*, *Margaret*, *No*, *Paradise: Faith*, *Sightseers*, *Silver Linings Playbook* and *West of Memphis*.

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Haneke's most French work is a quiet meditation on what it's like to lose, in old age, the person closest to you. Rarely has such a chamber piece been simultaneously so forensic yet heart-wrenching, and the film, with its sparky insightful performances from Trintignant and Riva, combines precision and lyricism like a late Beethoven quartet.

Beyond the Hills (Cristian Mungiu) See caption above.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

The struggle between business hucksterism and seat-of-the-pants adventurism has never been more vividly or beautifully illustrated than in Anderson's tale of a war-shocked drifter (Joaquin Phoenix) taken in by a cult figurehead (Philip Seymour Hoffman).

Something in the Air (Après mai) (Olivier Assayas, France)

Too often have the late 1960s been portrayed as near-caricature, which makes Assayas's film a terrific, uplifting, breathing exception.



It follows the fortunes of Gilles (Clément Métayer), a high-school art student torn between muses as all certainties are explored.

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Though a second viewing of this made me feel there's too much cool distance between film and viewer, *Tabu* remains the most intellectually audacious and stylistically innovative feature of the year. Each of its parts – the semi-humorous African prologue, present-day Lisbon melodrama and romantic African past recalled as movie – is exquisitely apposite.

Highlights: I can't compete with Mark Cousins's annus mirabilis, but I am very proud of what my *S&S* compadres achieved this year: I loved announcing the countdown to the top-ten poll that saw *Vertigo* displace *Citizen Kane* (the organisation of which was a Sisyphean task, if ever there was one), I was wowed by the effort that went into the reorganisation and redesign of the magazine and the creation of the digital edition, both of which turned out better than I could have hoped. After that, Venice turned out to be the best big festival for films and Morelia the best festival experience (as you will later read). And the best stat is that more than half a million people visited our Top 100 film page on the web.

DAVID JENKINS

Critic, 'Little White Lies', UK

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

This guy... I'll follow him anywhere.

Beyond the Hills (Cristian Mungiu)

Better than 4,3,2? I reckon so.

Museum Hours (Jem

Cohen, Austria/USA)

A wistful city symphony, a classical melodrama, some sage, intertextual musings on art history. Bliss.

The Last Time I Saw Macao (A Última Vez Que Vi Macau) (João Pedro Rodrigues & João Rui Guerra da Mata, France/Portugal/Macao)

A hard-boiled transsexual crime saga plays out à la Marker. Like *Museum Hours*, this summons the heady romantic qualities of classic-era Hollywood and displaces the hell out of them.

Life of Pi (Ang Lee, USA/Taiwan/Australia/UK/Canada)

The year's best film about death.

Highlights: It was great to see the UCLA restoration of Shirley Clarke's jazz/dope odyssey *The Connection* (1962) at a midnight screening in snow-coated Berlin. There was also something fascinating about seeing an extremely grubby print of Kieslowski's *Blind Chance* (1982) at the Busan Film Festival in a screen full of Korean

students, most of whom left the auditorium in a state of visible shock.

At the beginning of October there was an amazing day-long cine-memorial for Chris Marker at London's Horse Hospital, organised by writer-critic Chris Darke. Fascinating rarities were screened, and each block of films came with a lovely, detailed introduction. But the most exciting aspect was that this modest space was absolutely filled to capacity, with people sitting on the floors, sharing chairs and standing in the aisles.

PHILIP KEMP

Critic, UK

About Elly (Asghar Farhadi, France/Iran)

Reaching us in the wake of the superbly judged *A Separation*, Farhadi's previous feature confirms his status as potentially the finest director currently working in Iran.

Killer Joe (William Friedkin, USA)

Good to see Friedkin continuing the unexpected revival of his career. In the title role, Matthew McConaughey is the embodiment of laidback, saurian menace.

Looper (Rian Johnson, USA/China)

After the disappointment of *The Brothers Bloom*, Johnson redeems himself with a satisfyingly twisty and intelligent blend of SF and thriller.

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo) (Jean-Pierre & Luc

Dardenne, Belgium/France/Italy)

Sightseers (Ben Wheatley, UK)

Delectably pitch-black comedy from actor-screenwriters Alice Lowe and Steve Oram, with Ben Wheatley confirming his status as the most refreshingly offbeat and unpredictable of British crime-movie directors.

Highlight: Jean Grémillon *During the Occupation*: an unduly forgotten director gets the scrupulous Criterion treatment in this three-movie box-set.

GABE KLINGER

Critic, USA

Arnulf Rainer (1960) + Antiphon + Monument Film installation

(Peter Kubelka, Austria)

the war (James Benning, USA)

Differently, Molussia (Autrement, la Molussie) (Nicolas Rey, France)

American Falls (Phil Solomon, USA)

To the Wonder (Terrence Malick, USA)

These were not exactly films but site-specific performances, ephemeral and clandestine objects – total UFOs. Every experience literally unrepeatable.

Lowlights: 2012 was a bummer for the almost unthinkable concentration of one-of-a-kind creative talent that passed on: Vogel, Marker, Tony Scott, Hanoun, Sarris, Gazzara, Favio, Wakamatsu, Angelopoulos, Elliot Stein, Donna Summer, Adam Yauch, Paulo César Saraceni, Etta James, Soto, Eduardo de Gregorio... None, however, hit me quite as hard as the untimely death of filmmaker Carlos Reichenbach, who taught me and countless others that true cinephilia requires unwavering enthusiasm and selflessness. RIP Carlão.

ROBERT KOEHLER

Critic and director of programming, Film Society of Lincoln Center, USA

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-

Taylor & Véréna Paravel)

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

Neighbouring Sounds

(Kleber Mendonça Filho)

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Highlights: Due to mitigating (including legal) circumstances, Kenneth Lonergan insists that the three-hour cut of *Margaret* released on the US DVD two-disc package (which includes the shorter theatrical release on Blu-ray) shouldn't be referred to as the 'director's cut'. Better to call it the extended cut – or the superior cut. The new version reveals Lonergan's magnificent epic of New York's Upper West Side in the early years of the new century – and of the fascinating flawed and contradictory teen heroine at its centre – to be one of the great American melodramas.

It was João Pedro Rodrigues and João Rui Guerra da Mata's year in many ways: a brilliant, quicksilver mystery with great formal playfulness

(*The Last Time I Saw Macao*), the funniest and most mordant short film I saw this year (*Morning of Saint Anthony's Day*) and a sublime recalibration of Cocteau's *La Voix humaine* (*As the Flames Rose*) all

reinforcing the sense that the two Joãos – partners in life – have become one of today's most creative and productive filmmaking teams.

DEREK MALCOLM

Critic, 'Evening Standard', UK

Beyond the Hills (Cristian Mungiu)

In the Fog (V tumanie) (Sergei

Loznitsa, Germany/Russia/

Latvia/Netherlands/Belarus)

Silent Souls (Ovsyanki) (Aleksei

Fedorchenko, Russia/USA)

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Ship of Theseus (Anand Gandhi)

My best moment of the year was discovering this film in rough-cut form at the Film Bazaar, Goa. It's the best independent Indian debut for something like a decade: three interrelated stories about the tattered soul of contemporary India. Sometimes it's worthwhile being a critic!

ADRIAN MARTIN

Critic and co-editor, 'LOLA', Australia

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

A Woman's Revenge (A

Vingança de Uma Mulher) (Rita

Azevedo Gomes, Portugal)

Almayer's Folly (Chantal Akerman)

La noche de enfrente (Raúl

Ruiz, Chile/France)

The Last Time I Saw Macao (João Pedro Rodrigues & João Rui Guerra da Mata)

Highlight: The year's most extended moment of cinematic wonderfulness happened on TV: Series 1 of Lena Dunham's remarkable *Girls*. Episode 7, 'Welcome to Bushwick aka The Crackcircuit' (directed by Jody Lee Lipes), used a serial-TV staple – the party sequence that brings all characters and story threads into the same space – and squeezed from it an indelible final transition: the cut from Adam (Adam Driver) angrily yelling at Hannah (Dunham), "Do you want me to be your boyfriend?" to three people and a bicycle jammed into the back seat of a taxi – with Hannah smiling beatifically. Neither Bresson nor Carax could have handled that very emotional ellipsis better.

SOPHIE MAYER

Critic and academic, UK

AI Weiwei: Never Sorry

(Alison Klayman, USA)

Klayman's punchy, Twitter-interspersed film is inventive (and politically important), sharing its sensibility and a roving restlessness with essay films *Nostalgia for the Light* and *Swandown*, and a curiosity about artists and audiences with more straightforward docs *Searching for Sugar Man* and *El Bulli: Cooking in Progress*.

Ginger & Rosa (Sally Potter, UK/Germany/Canada/Denmark)

The apparent revival of Cold War politics between the US and



Russia, Israel and Iran's nuclear brinksmanship and climate-change chaos gave Potter's Cuban Missile Crisis-era film a charge of urgency rather than nostalgia. Countering the violent allegories of anxiety in the summer blockbusters, an absorbing and poetic film of beauty, intensity and art as a force for change.

This Is Not a Film (Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmasb)

See caption page 53.

I'm Going to Change My Name (Alaverdy) (Maria Saakyan, Armenia/Russia/Denmark/Germany)

Along with Jem Cohen's *Museum Hours*, my stand-out of the London Film Festival. Idiosyncratic filmmaking, utterly confident, plunging the viewer into the vivid, brilliantly imagined consciousness of Evridika, a dreamy teenage girl in small-town Armenia. Saakyan promises to do for Caucasian cinema what Lanthimos and Tsangaris have done in Greece.

The Nine Muses (John Akomfrah, UK) A shockingly limited release for this stunning and absorbing meditation on Englishness, immigration, movement, displacement and the medium of cinema. So densely layered that it demands and repays multiple viewings; so striking that I fell in love with it from the first moments.

Highlight: The opening of *The Tanks at Tate Modern* – the space – the screenings – the permanent installations – the sense of possibility – the connections between Expanded Cinema and expanding social media. A triumphant new home for experimental audiovisual media, and an ongoing event.

DANIELA MICHEL

Director, Morelia Film Festival, Mexico

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Beyond the Hills (Cristian Mungiu)

Something in the Air (Olivier Assayas)

Ginger & Rosa (Sally Potter)

Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico/France/Germany/Netherlands)

Highlights: Attending the Hungarian Film Week hosted by the great Béla Tarr, where the film *Final Cut* by György Pálfi had its premiere. It was a wonderful event where I could feel an enduring passion for filmmaking, in a country where it is increasingly difficult to make films. Later this year Tarr announced the opening of his school in Sarajevo, which I think will be an extraordinary event in the world of cinema.

I was also very impressed by the first edition of the Curaçao-Rotterdam Film Festival, which will be a great showcase for films from Central America and the Caribbean. And it was a delight to attend the Lyon Film Festival – the most extraordinary place I know for discovering and rediscovering classic films.

HENRY K. MILLER

Critic and academic, UK

Cosmopolis (David Cronenberg)

Damsels in Distress (Whit Stillman, USA)

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

The Turin Horse (Béla Tarr)

Dredd (Pete Travis, UK/USA/India)

Highlight: Sam Fuller's *Park Row* probably isn't the best film revived on DVD this year, but it might be the best DVD revival by dint of timing (and Masters of Cinema's package is typically great). It's the right year for a film idealising the free press and, more forlornly, the old ways of producing it.

KATE MUIR

Critic, 'The Times', UK

Amour (Michael Haneke)

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Two Years at Sea (Ben Rivers, UK)

In a world of clunky prose films, this is a piece of poetry – of the visual and musical sort, since there is almost no dialogue in Rivers's remarkable mystical portrait of a Scottish hermit, except when the hairy old gent finds a rusting can in a rotting caravan and says, "Beans!" Shot on mucky 16mm in black and white, the film cools the blood wonderfully.

Beasts of the Southern

Wild (Benh Zeitlin)

See caption right.

Skyfall (Sam Mendes, USA/UK)

To my delight, Mendes gave us a past-the-sell-by-date Bond for a dying Empire. M, surprisingly, turned out to be the greatest Bond Girl ever – a magnificent Judi Dench, aged 77.

Highlight: The surprise arrival, via the Venice and London film festivals, of *Wadjda*, the first film ever directed by a woman in Saudi Arabia. Filmed against very long odds indeed, Haifaa Al-Mansour's charming, sharp drama tells the story of an 11-year-old girl who wants to buy a green bike. I had dinner with Haifaa at the LFF, and she's determined to try for *Wadjda* as Saudi Arabia's Oscar entry next year – although there are no cinemas in the country for a qualifying screening.

KIM NEWMAN

Critic, UK

Sightseers (Ben Wheatley)

Excision (Richard Bates Jr, USA)

Damsels in Distress (Whit Stillman)

Moonrise Kingdom (Wes Anderson)

Berberian Sound Studio

(Peter Strickland)

Highlight: Screenings of the restorations of Universal monster movies: *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (in 3D) and *Bride of Frankenstein*.

GEOFFREY O'BRIEN

Critic, USA

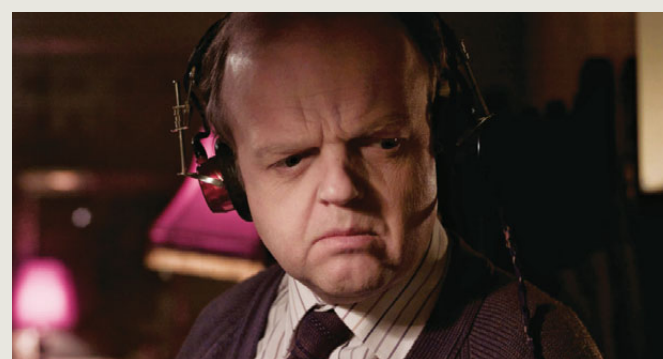
The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Moonrise Kingdom (Wes Anderson)

Farewell, My Queen (Les Adieux à la reine) (Benoît Jacquot, France/Spain)



7 Moonrise Kingdom Wes Anderson's film struck a chord in its exuberant use of Benjamin Britten's music, but I also loved it for its great humour and surprising (for this director) humanity. David Thompson



5 Berberian Sound Studio Sound is pivotal in Peter Strickland's blackly comic, stylish and off-kilter riff on 1970s Italian horror, which thumbs its nose at English pastoral roots – with a very English irreverence. Carmen Gray



5 Beasts of the Southern Wild I'll never forget Quvenzhané Wallis cookin' up a storm with a blowtorch, or the miracles unfolding in the sweaty Cajun bayou. First features don't get much better. Kate Muir



4 Holy Motors *Born from the womb of cinephilic history, raised into a many-headed beast, dangerous and passionate, it shows how cinema can recall its past and augur its future.*

Kong Rithdee



3 Amour *A devastating experience that joins Michael Haneke's icy, immaculate style to an intrinsically emotional subject: what happens to a harmonious marriage when the wife suffers a series of debilitating strokes.* Kenneth Turan



2 Tabu *In turning a melancholy drama about three lonely women in modern Lisbon into an African colonial idyll of adulterous love, Portuguese director Miguel Gomes pulled off the year's greatest conjuring trick.* Graham Fuller

➔ Above all for the scenes of Versailles in nocturnal disarray: life as the bubble pops. **The Kid with a Bike** (Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne) **This Is Not a Film** (Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmasb) **Highlights:** Out of so many, the re-emergence in New York of Luis Buñuel's *Tristana*, Jean Grémillon's *Lumière d'été* and Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* – and, just now, a year's end gift of Hitchcock restored for Blu-ray.

ANDREA PICARD

Critic and curator, Toronto International Film Festival, Canada

Differently, Molussia (Autrement, la Molussie) (Nicolas Rey) Flouting the use of the word 'occupy' and instead invoking the underappreciated theories and prose of Günther Anders, Rey has made the year's most timely, acute and chilling film – one with 362,880 permutations, one each for all the ways in which the world is sick and in need of gross improvement.

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel) Sensory ethnography or Vertovian heavy metal on the high seas, *Leviathan* ushers in a host of complex ontological questions about cinema's contemporary state via total immersion into deep-sea fishing, an activity that dates to the Palaeolithic and retains to this day its primeval brutality.

Viola (Matías Piñeiro, Argentina) A virtuosic cinematic roundelay cum incantatory Shakespeare mash-up with sexy young things from Buenos Aires, *Viola* is loquacious, sexy and casually cerebral as it spins a dizzying web of desire and dramaturgy.

La noche de enfrente (Raúl Ruiz)

The Student (Darezhan Omirbaev, Kazakhstan) Beautifully old-fashioned, beguilingly stilted and replete with cinephilic *clin d'oeils*, Ruiz's swansong *La noche de enfrente* and Omirbaev's Bresson-soaked *Student* revel and bask in the light of influence. The former is a sprightly summa and farewell, the latter a stinging social allegory, both suitably stylised to the filmmakers' own sensibilities with a decidedly literary bent, looking backwards and forwards at once.

Highlight/lowlight: While *Holy Motors* proved a high point of return, the year's most notable event was one of disappearance. The loss of Chris Marker is immeasurable to all those who love cinema and spend a great deal of their time creating, admiring, interpreting, writing and talking about images – ones that move, are static or are forever lodged in our memory, be they real, imagined, desired or planted by a futuristic feline.

JAMES QUANDT

Critic, USA

La noche de enfrente (Raúl Ruiz)

Plus Ruiz's rediscovered 1963 short *La maleta*. Life seems untenable without more films to anticipate from him!

The Last Time I Saw Macao (João Pedro Rodrigues & João Rui Guerra da Mata)

In Another Country (Dareun

Narayeseo) (Hong Sangsoo, South Korea)

No (Pablo Larraín)

Perret in France and Algeria

(Perret in Frankreich und Algerien)

(Heinz Emigholz, Germany)

NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

Critic, India/UK

Blancanieves (Pablo Berger)

A terrific new silent version of Snow White that puts in the shade the two other takes on that fairytale released this year, avoids the maudlin excesses of *The Artist* and pays homage to German expressionism without, thankfully, going the full Guy Maddin.

Skyfall (Sam Mendes)

Miss Lovely (Ashim Ahluwalia, India)

Wonderfully crafted tale of sibling feud set in the lurid world of 1980s Bombay schlock/horror/porn filmmaking, enriched by its meticulous production design.

Seven Psychopaths (Martin

McDonagh, UK/USA)

McDonagh manages to out-Tarantino Quentin, and in the process delivers the most belly laughs of the year with a clever script that's an equal-opportunities offender.

My Brother the Devil (Sally El Hosaini)

This fascinating window into the little-seen world of British Egyptians masterfully explores teen gang culture, complete with authentic argot.

Highlight: During the course of writing his biography I met India's biggest superstar Rajinikanth, an actor with near-divine status among his fanatical cult following who has spawned more than 50,000 fanclubs across the world. I was delighted to discover that he remains a simple, humble person without a trace of ego – unlike many of his compatriots.

NICOLAS RAPOLD

'Film Comment', USA

Almayer's Folly (Chantal Akerman)

Cosmopolis (David Cronenberg)

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel)

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Silver Linings Playbook

(David O. Russell, USA)

Repertory highlights: Jennifer

Dworkin's *Love and Diane* &

Ed Pincus's *Diaries* (1971-76) &

William Wellman & celebrating

Fassbinder's 30th deathaversary

& Frank Oz's *What About Bob?*

KONG RITHDEE

'The Bangkok Post', Thailand

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

The memory of cinema and of storytelling, of vanished glory and doomed romance, reclaimed and retold in this beautiful narcotic of a movie.

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)

See caption page 58.

Margaret (Kenneth Lonergan, USA)

The Upper West Side as the wilderness of conflicting emotions; one of the most frightening character portraits.

Ashes (Apichatpong)

Weerasethakul, Thailand)

The toy camera slices up time and reassembles fragments of trips, talk, memories, dreams. The colours are infernal. Then it ends, as it should, with a funeral fireworks.

Spring Breakers (Harmony

Korine, USA)

Mad, lush, sweaty, naive, stupid, hellish, irresistible.

Highlight: For the second year, the Thai Film Archive registers 25 films as National Cinematographic Heritage. The list includes newsreels, documentary films and features, mostly old but some fairly recent. In all, they sketch the journey of the Thai movie industry and history of the past 85 years, and represent an ongoing effort in preserving, restoring and promoting the cinematic treasure that has been long neglected.

TIM ROBEY

'The Daily Telegraph', UK

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

Beasts of the Southern

Wild (Benh Zeitlin)

Nostalgia for the Light

(Patricio Guzmán)

I was sceptical about whether the stargazing and suffering would mesh in any sensible way, but Guzmán's compassion defeated all doubt. A humbling reverie.

War Witch (Rebelle) (Kim

Nguyen, Canada)

Fear in the jungle, bullets in the sky, love in a hopeless place. Stands rightfully alongside *Johnny Mad Dog*, crackling with *tendresse* and horror.

Beauty (Oliver Hermanus)

From the unnerving first shot, here's a director completely in charge of his voyeuristic medium, plus one of the year's unshakeable performances from Deon Lotz.

Highlight: Exploring the Paris rep circuit, *Pariscope* in hand, I lucked in with an afternoon viewing of André De Toth's magnificent *Day of the Outlaw* (1959), which threw me for a loop. Robert Ryan, in surely his most complex performance, and Burl Ives – both start out seeming like villains; the Saturday-night forced-dance sequence where all the women in town submit to being groped; questions of what civilisation and morality mean. And a killer climax. It's an absolute gold-star western, as good as Boetticher's very best.



'In the Fog'

JONATHAN ROMNEY

'The Independent on Sunday', UK

Amour (Michael Haneke)

Tabu (Miguel Gomes)

One of the few genuine UFOs of the year, a deliciously characterful and original film steeped in tenderness, historic regret and a peculiarly postmodern strain of *saudade*. I also loved the anachronistic Ramones-play-Phil Spector lip-synching, and cinema's animal of the year 2012 – the "sad and melancholy crocodile".

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Berberian Sound Studio

(Peter Strickland)

In the Fog (Sergei Loznitsa)

Loznitsa's war film is a superbly constructed anecdote, at once simple and troublingly complex. One of the films I most want to see again in 2013.

Highlights: Guy Maddin's 'Seances Project', which I visited while he was installed at Paris's Pompidou Centre. Part of a long-running project to film legendary lost or unrealised scripts, this bizarre, quixotic enterprise could only have been conceived by Maddin, and I was thrilled to see him in action halfway through his one-film-a-day marathon – channelling a 1923 Mizoguchi melodrama, while Udo Kier and the cast grappled with mouthfuls of ectoplasm.

Most overlooked film: Alain Gomis's *Tey*, an existential miniature from Senegal. When I say 'miniature', I'm thinking about the film's concision and grace, but *Tey*'s scope is an entire life, squeezed into the allegorical day of a hero who knows he's fated to die. *Tey* is as much dance as film, both because of the camera's sinuous mobility and because of the eloquent physicality and easy wit of Gomis's lead Saul Williams.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Critic, US

Unless one has enough time to do a proper survey of the films one's seen during a given year – and I don't – lists of this kind tend to favour recent discoveries. With the exception of the second and third items in this alphabetical line-up, these are autumn revelations:



'Spring Breakers'

Far from Afghanistan (John Gianvito, Jon Jost, Minda Martin, Soon-Mi Yoo & Travis Wilkerson, USA)

Gianvito – assisted here by Andre Gregory and others – offers one of his modest yet irreplaceable lessons in human decency, with plenty of thoughtful scruples about how to phrase as well as apply them.

Jerry and Me (Mehrnaz

Saeed-Vafa, USA)

A 38-minute autobiographical essay about growing up in Iran and then adjusting to American life – largely couched in the form of clips from Jerry Lewis films, *Rio Bravo*, *Imitation of Life* and *Psycho*, dubbed into Farsi – is another invaluable crosscultural lesson.

Margaret (Kenneth Lonergan)

Even though Lonergan's two-and-a-half-hour urban masterpiece surfaced in the US late last year – to not nearly enough mainstream attention – it is only beginning to be discovered in Europe. (There's also a three-hour version, equally approved by the writer-director, available on DVD.) You might call this a vast 19th-century novel, with over a dozen important characters (beautifully performed by a superb cast) and an acute sense of the Manhattan zeitgeist circa 2003.

The Last Time I Saw Macao (João Pedro

Rodrigues & João Rui Guerra da Mata)

Not only do Rodrigues and da Mata do for *Macao* (and *Macao*) what Chris Marker did for *Vertigo* and San Francisco – they also work wonders with dogs, docks and an ongoing poetry of absence.

Tectonics (Peter Bo Rappmund, USA/Mexico)

This epic traversal of the Mexican-American border recalls some of the formal poetry of both James Benning and Chantal Akerman while forging a provocative politics of its own, based on notions and instruments of surveillance.

SUKHDEV SANDHU

Critic, UK

Practical Electronica (Ian Helliwell, UK)

In which the most distinguished bedroom boffin-lineage filmmaker in the UK pays homage to kindred spirit

F.C. Judd, amateur radio enthusiast, electronic-music proselytiser and a contemporary of fellow radiophonic pioneers such as Daphne Oram and Tristram Cary. Diligently researched and wittily constructed, it offers a fascinating circuit diagram of obscured post-war British culture – an especially crucial document for the growing field of tape studies.

The Bruce Lacey Experience (Nicholas Abrahams & Jeremy Deller, UK)

Deller's wonderful Hayward retrospective this year was called 'Joy in People', and this fond portrait of the eightysomething English director – a work of antic archivalism – provokes only joy.

Deep State (Karen Mirza

& Brad Butler, UK)

A blistering example – informed as much by the work of the Black Audio Film Collective as it is by Godard – of the current upsurge of interest in the histories and possibilities of the 'militant image'. Interlacing archival footage from Cairo, London 2011, Turkey and Bangladesh, it makes telling use of a 'riotonaut' figure to probe multinational repressions that annul global social-justice movements.

The Loneliest Planet (Julia Loktev, USA/Germany)

Any studio exec seeking to reboot the modern thriller for the post-Paul Greengrass era should see this apparently minimalist follow-up to the Russian-American director's *Day Night Day Night*, fusing 1970s formalism with an incredible eye – and ear – for the kind of infra-tonations that can under a world.

Hauntologies (John Akomfrah, UK)

A word too often used as a synonym for nostalgia for 1970s kids TV here links a collection of lush, aching, endlessly resonant gallery films about the enigmas of departure and arrival.

Highlights: A great year for independent British film (Kieron Evans, Andrew Köting, Peter Strickland, Mark Cousins), but my main memory was November's power outage of lower Manhattan: the 20th century's most cinematic city transformed into a blackened auditorium.



**FERNANDA SOLORZANO**

Critic, Mexico

Amour (Michael Haneke)**Blancanieves** (Pablo Berger)

A contemporary silent version of Snow White, this witty take on the jealous stepmother archetype is set in rural Spain at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)**Beasts of the Southern****Wild** (Benh Zeitlin)**Searching for Sugar Man**

(Malik Bendjelloul)

Highlight: After years of mixed emotions towards Carlos Reygadas's films, the opening sequence of *Post Tenebras Lux* completely blew my mind. The sight of a little girl surrounded by tamed and wild animals flawlessly summarises the various conflicts at the centre of his work.

KATE STABLES

Critic, UK

The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson)**Amour** (Michael Haneke)**Moonrise Kingdom** (Wes Anderson)**The Queen of Versailles**

(Lauren Greenfield, USA/Netherlands/UK/Denmark)

Beasts of the Southern**Wild** (Benh Zeitlin)

Highlight: The DVD of the year was *The Rafi Pitts Collection* – watching the Iranian director meld one cinema culture with another, poetry colliding with the paranoid thriller in a restrained but audacious fashion.

BRAD STEVENS

Critic, UK

4:44 Last Day on Earth (Abel Ferrara, USA/Switzerland/France)

Ferrara's latest has – perhaps surprisingly – attracted some positive reviews, though – less surprisingly – no UK distributor. Combining the rigour of Bresson with the energy of Renoir, this resembles Godard's *Film socialisme* in its ferocious optimism about modern regimes of imagery.

J. Edgar (Clint Eastwood, USA)

Richard Combs called it Eastwood's *Gertrud*, which seems about right, though this is also a companion piece to *Bird*, another biopic about a public performer portrayed as constantly retreating into darkness.

A Dangerous Method (David Cronenberg, UK/Germany/Canada/Switzerland)**Un été brûlant** (Philippe Garrel, France/Italy/Switzerland)

The latest films from Cronenberg and Garrel sum up themes and motifs their auteurs have been exploring for several decades, but give the impression – so typical of late works – that complexity can now be achieved with effortless ease.

Life Just Is (Alex Barrett, UK)**Highlight:** The appearance online

of English fan-subtitles for those few Naruse Mikio films that hadn't previously been accessible to non-Japanese speakers.

FRANCINE STOCK

'The Film Programme', Radio 4, UK

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)**Michael** (Markus Schleiner, Austria)**Moonrise Kingdom** (Wes Anderson)**The Master** (Paul Thomas Anderson)**This Is Not a Film** (Jafar Panahi & Mojtaba Mirtahmasb)

Highlight: Total cinematic immersion as guest artistic director of Bridport's From Page to Screen festival in April – five days of audiences and practitioners watching and debating film, whether in hundreds as James Watkins discussed *The Woman in Black* in the atmospheric 1920s Electric Palace (with a real ghost in the machine that night) or as Sir Tom Courtenay recalled *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, or in dozens for *Bunny Lake Is Missing* or *Went the Day Well?*. Masterclasses with Simon Beaufoy and Moira Buffini, late night dressing-up for *The Masque of the Red Death*...

AMY TAUBIN

Critic, USA

Cosmopolis (David Cronenberg)**The Gatekeepers** (Dror Moreh, Israel/France/Germany/Belgium)**Beasts of the Southern****Wild** (Benh Zeitlin)**Amour** (Michael Haneke)**Memories Look at Me (Ji yi wang zhe wo)** (Song Fang, China)

Highlights: I was heartened by the number of terrific movies by female directors: Yesim Ustaoglu's *Araf*; *Somewhere in Between*, Chantal Akerman's *Almayer's Folly*, Sally Potter's *Ginger & Rosa*... And despite the proliferation of digital junk, there was a wonderful array of small

American independent movies: Dan Sallitt's *The Unspeakable Act*, Andrew Seman's *Nancy Please*, Tim Sutton's *Pavilion*, Keith Miller's *Welcome to Pine Hill*, Noah Baumbach's *Frances Ha*, the late, great Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead* documentaries; and, although it's little more than a sketch for a Brooklyn remake of *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, Lisa Duva's smart, exhilarating *Cat Scratch Fever*.

DAVID THOMPSON

Critic and documentarist, UK

The Kid with a Bike (Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne)**Moonrise Kingdom** (Wes Anderson)

See caption page 57.

Holy Motors (Leos Carax)**Amour** (Michael Haneke)**The Master** (Paul Thomas Anderson)

Highlights: One great revival: *Ordet*, a staggering work of art, shown in a marvellous digital restoration at BFI Southbank. Fascinating to see some of the Hitchcock silents restored with mostly enjoyable new soundtracks performed live. Best print: *The Pleasure Garden*; worst music: *Downhill*.

KENNETH TURAN

'Los Angeles Times', USA

Amour (Michael Haneke)

See caption page 58.

The Gatekeepers (Dror Moreh)

Chilling, disturbing, riveting from beginning to end, this documentary portrait of six former heads of Israel's Shin Bet domestic counter-terrorism agency is potent enough to alter how you see the world.

Lincoln (Steven Spielberg)

Spielberg turns on a dime and delivers his most restrained, interior film, while Day-Lewis allows us to see a celebrated figure in ways we hadn't anticipated.

No (Pablo Larraín)

Chilean director Larraín takes a

little-remembered event in his country's history – a 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet's rule – and turns it into a tangy film that mixes reality and drama to provocative effect.

Silver Linings Playbook

(David O. Russell)

A David O. Russell movie that – like protagonists Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence – won't fit into any box. Dramatic, emotional, wickedly funny, it has the gift of going its own way.

Highlight: 'That Signature Style:

The Films of Mitchell Leisen' – a comprehensive UCLA Film & Television Archive retrospective that made it possible to fully appreciate this most perennially neglected of golden-age Hollywood directors.

CATHERINE WHEATLEY

Critic and academic, UK

Amour (Michael Haneke)**Beasts of the Southern****Wild** (Benh Zeitlin)**Martha Marcy May Marlene**

(Sean Durkin, USA)

Two Years at Sea (Ben Rivers)**Take This Waltz** (Sarah

Polley, Canada/France)

I gave *Take This Waltz* a rather ambivalent review at the time of its release, but it has stayed with me since, and I've had some really interesting, unsolicited correspondence from other women who've watched it and had quite a peculiar response to it. One of those instances where a film and one's opinion of it can really change shape over time.

Highlight: Hitchcock at the BFI.

So much fun, if only because (and this despite *Vertigo*'s top-ten victory) I'm not sure I met anyone over the course of the three weeks who actually admitted to liking Hitchcock. Didn't take long for the critical backlash to begin...

ARMOND WHITE

Critic, 'CityArts', USA

Unforgivable (Impardonnables)

(André Téchiné, France)

A tumultuous view of private lives as society and society as family.

The Deep Blue Sea (Terence Davies)**Sacrifice (Zhao shi gu er)**

(Chen Kaige, China)

The source of culture and morality is made vivid in this most majestic myth.

Damsels in Distress (Whit Stillman)**Holy Motors** (Leos Carax)

Highlights: Two critics summed up 2012. The late Andrew Sarris once said, "Film is the art to which all the other arts aspire"; and Nick James's *S&S* poll observation about "people who are not sure who they are, but who are busy reconstructing themselves and each other to fit a kind of cinema ideal". Together these statements explain the death of cinephilia as popular passion into shrunken elite culture. ☹



1 The Master *The sheer, radioactive strangeness of the film is what exerts the initial grip – then the outstanding performance of Joaquin Phoenix as Freddie Quell. Perhaps it should have been called 'The Disciple'.* Peter Bradshaw

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WILLIAM KLEIN

Before Pop Art, Brooklyn-born William Klein infused photography with comic-book intensity. Then he moved to Paris and launched a film career that has lasted more than half a century, involved Alain Resnais, *Vogue* and the Black Panthers, and yielded such maverick features as *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?* and *Mister Freedom* – and now a cinematic and photographic retrospective at Tate Modern. **Interview by Brian Dillon**

By the time William Klein made his first film *Broadway by Light* in 1958, he had already revolutionised one medium with his first photographic book, *Life Is Good & Good for You in New York: Trance Witness Revels*, published two years earlier. Klein's overprinted, grainy and frequently blurred photographs of his native city drew on comic-books and tabloid rags such as the *New York Sun* for their graphic blare, and on the energy of cinema for their wide-angle compositions and startling montage. *Broadway by Light* was an early departure from an already improvised and happenstance style: a film about the neon palimpsest of Times Square that Orson Welles described as the first film he'd seen where colour was essential.

Klein grew up in Brooklyn and served in the US Army in Europe after World War II before studying painting in Paris. He went back to New York to take photographs for *Vogue*, returned to Paris – where his New York book was championed by a young Chris Marker – and went on to make a series of satirical films, beginning in 1966 with *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?*, a scurrilous farewell to the fashion industry. In 1968 he directed *Mister Freedom*, an antic and comic-book-styled attack on the cultural and military hubris of his home country. Documentaries followed, on Muhammad Ali (whom he had first filmed in 1964), Eldridge Cleaver and Little Richard. Klein returned to photography in the 1980s and has continued to make films: his "very profane" take on Handel's *Messiah* was completed in 1999 and he is planning to shoot his next film in Paris in 2013.

In early November, on the day of the US presidential election, I met Klein at his apartment on the Left Bank, where he spoke about his films of the past 50 years, breaking off now and then to fret about the possibility of a Romney/Ryan win ("I hate

all this shit about Jesus and God") or talk to his elderly cat, Nanou. Klein is 84 and nowadays he sounds slightly more like a New Yorker than the adoptive Parisian who so memorably voiced the English-language version of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* in 1962.

Brian Dillon: Your friend and collaborator Chris Marker once wrote of your films that every frame is a perfect William Klein photograph. And you said of your first book that only the sequencing counted, "like a movie". Were you already thinking of film and photography alongside one another earlier in the 1950s?

William Klein: Well, I didn't know how to do a

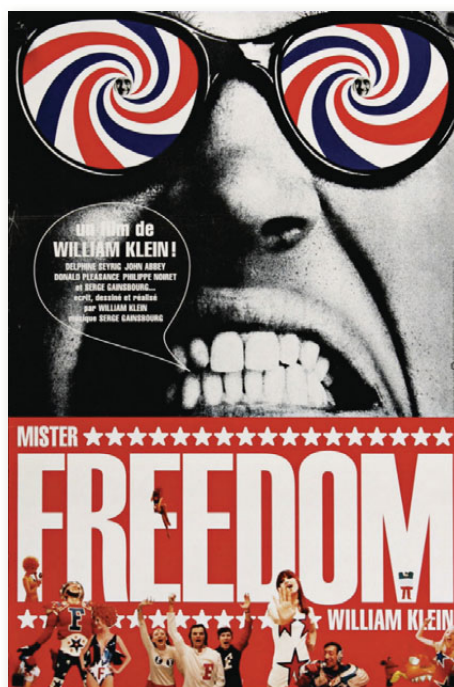
book. I was just discovering photography and once I had all these pictures, I showed them to editors in New York and nobody thought it was worthwhile to do a book with these photographs. They said, "What is this shit?" I came back to Paris and discovered there was a series of travel books called *Petite Planète*. I called them up and got an appointment and I went to this office which looked like NASA. Chris Marker was there with a laser gun in his belt, and he saw the photographs and said, "We'll do a book!" In fact he said, "We'll do a book or I quit!" He was like the *wunderkind* of this publishing house, Editions du Seuil, and he threatened to quit every month, so they gave him what he wanted.

BD: The sequencing of the New York book, and even the composition of individual images, also seems to owe something to comic-books. Was that a taste you shared with Marker?

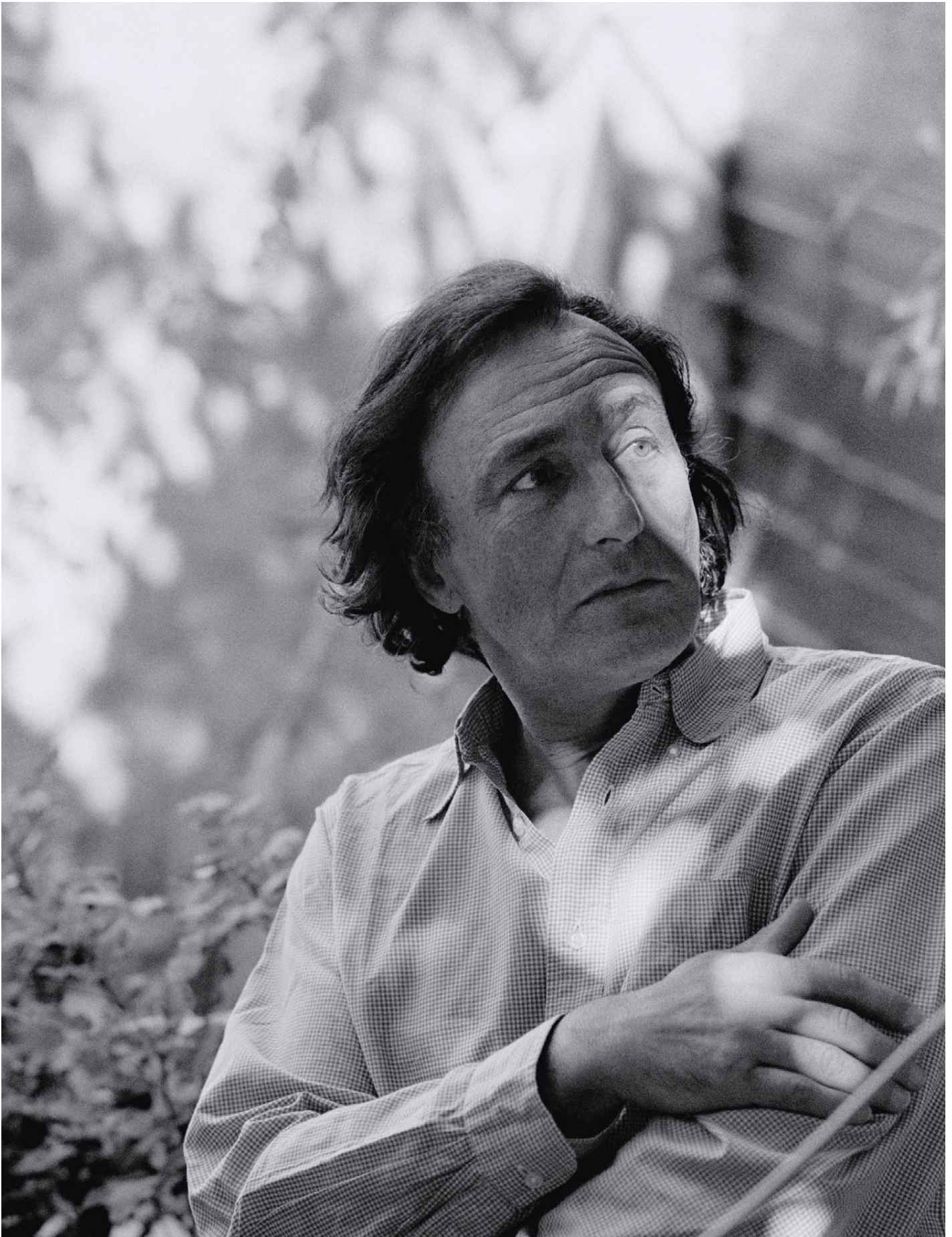
WK: Him and Alain Resnais. Chris introduced me to Resnais. They were two buddies – they were both tall and athletic, and they met in the army and hung around together. Chris was the first guy who made movies that I'd ever met.

BD: When you made 'Broadway by Light', they were both credited: Marker wrote the introductory voiceover and Resnais provided 'technical advice'. How much were they actually involved in making the film?

WK: It was Resnais who said to me, "Now you've done a book, you must do films." There were people in my family who were very hot lawyers and United Artists was their client; they were smart enough to take over United Artists. I did this first film and I wanted my cousin at UA to run it as a short before the feature, and they said, "If we show it, people will leave and they won't see the feature!" The film was very far from the book, but it was the same subject, more or less. I rented a camera and just filmed what I saw. The idea was to use



Above, 'Mister Freedom'; opposite, Klein in 1978



these commercials in Times Square as readymades, like Marcel Duchamp.

With Marker and Resnais, what happened was they had introduced me to this producer Anatole Dauman [of Argos Films], who had done films with both of them, and I showed him the rushes and he said, "I'll pay for the post-production, the editing and the music." Dauman made his films with the help of the [French] government and he had to have French technicians, and so on my film he had Chris Marker and Alain Resnais. But Alain never saw the rushes; he saw the rough cut. Still, he became 'technical adviser'. Chris wrote those few lines, which were typical French intellectual bullshit, you know?

BD: But beautiful....

WK: Yes, beautiful bullshit!

BD: Your exhibition at Tate Modern includes a quotation from Orson Welles about 'Broadway by Light': "the first film I've seen in which colour was absolutely necessary". When and where did he say this? Did you meet him?

WK: I was coming back from New York and on the quay I saw this big figure: Orson Welles, with a cigar and an attaché case – no luggage. And I said, "Listen, I did a film. You're going to take the boat – can I show it to you?" And he said, "Sure." I showed it to him in the cinema on the boat and he said that: this film couldn't have been made without colour. Which was true!

BD: 'Broadway by Light' is visually ravishing but it's also, as you have put it, a film about "brainwashing". I suppose one could say the same about your next film, 'Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?' – it seems as though it's the product of an ambivalence about the fashion industry rather than a total rejection or critique.

WK: It's about fashion and television and media – it's about brainwashing too. I decided I wanted to do a fiction film and a film about things I knew – which was the fashion world, television, filmmaking and so on. I'd been discovered by Alexander Liberman, who was the art director at Condé Nast; he saw an exhibition of my abstract photographs and called me up. I went to see him and he said, "How would you like to work for *Vogue*?" And I said, "Doing what?" And he said, "I don't know. I work for *Vogue* – I'm a painter and sculptor, but during the week I put on a suit and I go down to the office, and on the weekend I paint and I sculpt. You could do something similar. What do you think?" And I said, "Fine." I'd never made much money; I'd sold a few paintings, but it wasn't enough to live on. When I made *Polly Maggoo* it was more or less the end of this collaboration with *Vogue* because I made a caricature of the editor-in-chief and the fashion people, so they didn't really adore me.

BD: In that sense 'Polly Maggoo' is the start of a much more explicitly political phase in your work. But the look of the film, its humour, its absurdism – all of these are quite far from what your friends and colleagues on the Left might have wanted from a radical cinema. That disparity must have only increased with your next film, 'Mister Freedom', which takes a very stylised, comic-book approach to satirising American imperialism.

WK: *Mister Freedom* was also more or less

prompted by Chris Marker because in 1966 he was contacted by militant students who were organising agitprop meetings against the war in Vietnam. They said to Marker, "We have these meetings and we want to attract students with a film, but most of the political films that are being made are really shitty, grainy and badly done. Would you do a film for us?" And Marker said, "No, I won't do a film, but I'll get some friends to work on a film, a group effort." And so he contacted Godard, Resnais, Agnès Varda, Claude Lelouch, Joris Ivens and me – and it became *Loin du Viêt-nam* [*Far from Vietnam*, 1967].

But I was frustrated by the film because there was a lot of press and excitement about this collective work, but not many people came to see it. And I wondered how I would make a political film which would be attractive. I thought: do a comic-strip film. In those days, it was a put-down to say a film looked like a comic-strip; nowadays it's a guarantee of authenticity and invention.

I wanted the film to be seen, to be popular. I would have liked Marlon Brando to play *Mister Freedom*, or someone like that – Lee Marvin, maybe. [Instead, he was played by the little-known John Abbey.] And for the girl I wanted a pop singer. But Delphine Seyrig was sitting right there where you are and she saw the scenario and said, "What's this?" I explained and she said, "I can do it!" I said, "What do you mean? You're going to be like a bimbo? You don't care?" "No, I can do it!"

She was kind of American – she spent the war in New York and she was really as American as a French girl could be. So she dug the whole idea and she was great and very funny and sexy and

I'm frustrated by the fact that I don't see enough of America. I went from New York to Paris, and New York was my America

everything. She was like my sister; I loved her.

BD: The release of 'Mister Freedom' was delayed.

WK: Because there were some scenes in the street – demonstrations – in the film, so the French censor thought it was a film about May '68 and revolution in France. So it was censored for nine months, then finally came out.

BD: You were filming in Paris in May '68.

Was it clear at the time that a discrete film project should come of that?

WK: What happened was I was doing the editing of *Mister Freedom* and in May '68 the movie industry went on strike; all the film people said, "We will not work on films. We'll invent a revolutionary cinema." And so they had what they called the "*États généraux du cinéma*", in the suburbs at Suresnes. Everybody gathered to discuss, day and night, how to invent a revolutionary cinema in France.

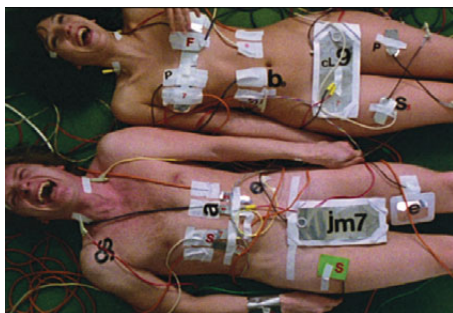
I went out there, and it was decided that we would do a film – a collective film once again – on May '68. There were filmmakers who were Trotskyites, Maoists and anarchists, and each group had film and cameras allotted to them. Producers were scared to death of this movement because they thought there was really going to be a revolution in France, and they'd be hanging from the lampposts. So they said, "You want filmstock? Here, we'll give you filmstock. We'll give you tapes for sound and we'll lend you Nagras" and so on.

We were pretty well equipped to make this collective film. However, once May '68 was over, each group had these reels of film under their arms and they said: "Well, let's make our own film, and fuck everybody else!" And so this collective operation never really happened.

BD: Your work in the 1970s continued to be satirical: you made 'The Model Couple' ('Le Couple témoin'), which was rather prescient given the advent of reality TV, but you had also begun a series of films about prominent black Americans: Muhammad Ali, Eldridge Cleaver, Little Richard. How



Friend of a friend: Klein gained access to Muhammad Ali, centre, after meeting Malcolm X on a plane



'The Model Couple'

did you come to make the film 'Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther' in Algeria in 1969?

WK: *Loïn du Viêt-nam* caught the eye of Algerian film producers, and they invited me to make a collective film. In Algiers they had money and they had a film board and they invited representatives from around 15 African countries so we had people from Kenya, from Guinea-Bissau, from all over. The idea of having film directors from different countries working together like *Loïn du Viêt-nam* was a pipe dream because the Algerians didn't know they were on the blacklist of many countries' film boards. The Algerian filmmakers were not liked by African filmmakers or by the Cubans: they had lots of money but no lab. So the Cubans said, "Well, fuck you." The film didn't work out so I decided to make a mega-documentary on this festival.

I was there in Algeria, filming the Pan-African Cultural Festival, and Cleaver was there. The Algerians' idea was to have representatives from different countries – the independence movements and revolutionary movements of several countries still under colonial rule – represented in Algiers. They invited the Black Panthers as official representatives of revolution in the US. Cleaver was working with a little group of revolutionary filmmakers, but these guys were tripping over their cables and generally fucking up the film and Cleaver saw us working with our set-up of different directors from all over. He was impressed. He sent someone to contact me and said, "I'd like to do a film to explain why I skipped bail and why I'm here running away from the police in America." He had this bloated idea of doing a film with him in the middle, delivering his 'State of the Union' address.

We decided once we'd finished filming the festival we'd do a film with Cleaver – a portrait of Cleaver. I was fascinated by the Black Panthers because I'd been in contact with the Nation of Islam, thanks to Muhammad Ali, and their way of talking was that the whites were the devil and they'd get rid of them once they took over.

I was making a film on Muhammad Ali in 1964 and I went to Miami to film everything around the fight for the world championship with Sonny Liston. I had the good luck of flying down to Miami and there was one empty seat and the guy sitting next to this empty seat was Malcolm X. Nobody wanted to sit next to him because he was on the cover of *Life* magazine and he was the bogeyman. I spoke to the guy; he was interested to meet a Jewish filmmaker from



'Mister Freedom'

New York, living in Paris and coming to film the future champion and Black Muslim leader. I spent two-and-a-half hours talking to Malcolm X and he spread the word with Ali's camp that I was OK, and when I got there I had complete access. We became more or less friends – as much as you become friends with a guy like Ali.

BD: You revisited and expanded the Ali film in 1974 and you made 'The Little Richard Story' in 1980. Did you have a sense that it was the third 'portrait'?

WK: No, it came about by accident – but all these things were accidents. I was contacted by a German producer who had a deal with German television to make a series of films about America and he asked if I was interested. I said yes, because I'm always frustrated by the fact that I don't see enough of America. I thought there was a great opportunity to do some filming in America. The first film he wanted me to do was on Dolly Parton. I went to Nashville and for some reason she backed out.

I was there in Nashville with a producer and a crew and enough material to make a film but no film to make. It was a crazy place and I ran into a guy who was out of it completely and this was Little Richard. He'd been contacted by these two mafia types who were making bibles; instead of giving flowers to families who had lost someone, you would give this big beautiful bible – the Black Heritage Bible – and they wanted someone to pimp for this bible. They



'Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?'

found out Little Richard was out of work and no longer a star. Richard jumped at the opportunity because he was very frustrated not to have crowds screaming for him. He went along with these bible people and I became interested in him – we had filmed some stuff in Nashville.

BD: The film looks to me as if you are discovering America for the first time.

WK: I was! In America, kids would go to college and get out and buy a second-hand car and go across the country and discover America. I never did that; I went from New York to Paris, and New York was my America.

BD: You've just had a retrospective exhibition of your photographs at Tate Modern and it begins with 'Broadway by Light'. Are you working on a film at the moment?

WK: I'm preparing a film. You know how all the concierges in Paris are Portuguese? I dreamed up a scenario where the Portuguese concierge of a house has an accident outside of work time so she's not covered by health insurance. She's afraid of losing her job so she calls up her sister, who's a film star in Portugal, and the film star comes to Paris to be a concierge in a typical French house. Except it's not so typical because the building is full of everything that's happening in Paris: music, art and so on. Each apartment is a different world. It'll be good! 📞

i Klein's films are showing at Tate Modern until 20 January alongside the exhibition 'William Klein + Daido Moriyama'



Sign of the times: Klein's first film 'Broadway by Light' used Times Square illuminations

VIENNALE

THE NAKED SPUR



Fired up: Sylvain George's *'Vers Madrid'* is an unashamedly partisan but beautifully direct observational document of the protest movement in Madrid

In its 50th-anniversary year, the Viennale continues to inspire widespread affection and admiration among festival-goers

By Kieron Corless

There'd already been something like six tributes to the Viennale organised by various film festivals around the world in 2012, its 50th-anniversary year, before the bandwagon finally reached home base in late October. It's hard to think of any other film festival that remotely inspires such widespread affection and admiration, such a strong desire to be associated with what one writer termed its "leftist glamour", whatever the motives and even if that phrase is altogether reductive. I've been similarly under its spell for years now, repeatedly drawn by inspired combinations of elements, by a certain uncompromising stance (particularly regarding film projection – see Forum page 76), and by the opportunity to discover and learn things I'd be unlikely to elsewhere. Lest that seem too cosily consensual, too comfortable a fit with one's own tastes and predilections, it should be said there's still always space for argument and dissent,

which is as it should be. For instance, I'd be at some pains to erect impregnable barricades around any festival I was organising in order to prevent *Beyond the Hills*, *Dark Horse* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* getting near it. And the lumping together of such wildly disparate figures as Narcisa Hirsch and Mati Diop, to name but two, into a section summarily entitled '5 Women' seemed uncommonly thoughtless. Such irregularities were few and far between, though; elsewhere it was business as usual.

In recognition of its anniversary and its current pre-eminence on the festival circuit, three of the highlights of this year's Viennale are given extended coverage in the following pages of Wide Angle. Bad luck meant that by the time I arrived in the first week, special guest Michael Caine had already departed, leaving behind a warm afterglow and a fund of anecdotes; and the latest films by those Viennale stalwarts Jean-Marie Straub and Jean-Claude Rousseau only screened after I'd left. But I did finally get to see Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's mighty *Leviathan* on a big screen, which comes close to living up to its title. Shot entirely on a trawler off the coast of New Bedford in dangerous North Atlantic waters, it undoubtedly takes ethnographic documentary to a new level. Immersive isn't

quite the word – it's more a super-saturated, disorienting bombardment of sensory impressions, completely liberated from the encumbrances of narrative and character, even temporal logic. A dozen tiny GoPro digital cameras were attached to the fishermen, to parts of the boat, and plunged into the sea, releasing a chaotic, Brakhagian tumult of incredible images and sounds and energy. I wonder if 'film' is even the right word to describe *Leviathan*;

I've been under the Viennale's spell for years, drawn by the opportunity to learn things I'd be unlikely to elsewhere



'Differently, Molussia'

it's more akin to some livid, fissiparous living entity – a landmark documentary that we'll be hearing a lot more about in years to come.

If *Leviathan* was political in the broadest sense, other films in Vienna were more directly and conventionally so, particularly Anand Patwardhan's *Jai Bhim Comrade*, a heartfelt, incisive attack on the Indian caste system, at the bottom of which languish the so-called untouchables, in horrific conditions that the viewer thankfully isn't spared. The cold-blooded slayings by the police of several of that community at a demonstration led Vilas Ghogre, a musician friend of Patwardhan's, to kill himself in protest. What ensued was a prime example of cinema as communal process, buoyed along and embodied by a molten flow of music.

French director Sylvain George's *Vers Madrid* was also unashamedly partisan – a beautifully direct, observational document of the protest movement in Madrid, by some distance the film that moved me most in Vienna. But why? Something to do with the dialogue between young and old it records early on, the intoxication and optimism on display, the productive channelling of collective disbelief and rage. Interestingly, Georges describes *Vers Madrid* as a newsreel, of which more next issue.

In the midst of plenty, three other works registered powerfully. Nicolas Rey's *Differently, Molussia* (*Autrement, la Molussie*) is a film in nine chapters shown in random order, a series of parables about life in a fictional fascist state, accompanied by enigmatic, gorgeously crafted landscape images shot in 16mm. There's a little bit of Keiller here, and maybe Straub, in its collisions of history, politics and landscape, but Rey is very much his own man; his unique oeuvre will be explored in a forthcoming issue of *Sight & Sound*. Andrés Duque's *Dress Rehearsal for Utopia* (*Ensayo final para utopía*) mixes personal loss – the death of his father – with political struggle in Mozambique, partly figured through dance. Some of the imagery here was the most unforgettably strange and oneiric I've seen for a good while, and supported by compelling use of archive footage. *Anton's Right Here* (*Anton tut ryadom*) is the first film of Lyubov Arkus, a Russian film critic, and records her relationship with an autistic boy. It's a film of glowing images about institutional dereliction, but more than that, it's about the shrinking distance between two human beings, signified by Arkus's sudden recognition – near the end – of the camera as principal agent of change; not simply recording a process, but a tool of individual and collective empowerment. 📺



'Dress Rehearsal for Utopia'

VIENNALE OF GHOSTS AND PHANTOMS

The unjustly neglected cinema of Manuel Mozos offers valuable lessons in failure Portuguese-style, argues a fellow filmmaker

BY MIGUEL GOMES

I first met Manuel Mozos in February 1999, at the Fantasporto Fantastic Film Festival in the northern Portuguese city of Porto. Manuel was there to attend the first public screening of his film *...quando troveja*, and I was writing up the festival as a film critic for a daily paper. The film left me deeply impressed and I managed to get an interview with Manuel, one of the few interviews during my brief stint in journalism.

Our next encounter was two years later, when I was writing a book on his films for the first Manuel Mozos retrospective at the Festival de Cinema Luso-Brasileiro in Santa Maria da Feira. In the two intervening years, we had forged closer ties: I had asked him to edit my short film *Inventário de Natal* (2000), and his work had given me the courage to take a stab at editing my films myself.

...quando troveja was never far from my mind, and when I started on my first feature film *The Face You Deserve* (*A Cara que Mereces*),

Mozos appropriated the images and cinema of others in order to allow him to go on making his films

I wanted it to enter into a dialogue with Manuel's film. In both works, fantastical characters turn up in the protagonist's life in the midst of crisis. In Manuel's film, these are two spirits of the woods; in mine, it is a direct reference to the story of Snow White. I asked Manuel to co-write the script with me and he also took the role of a dwarf, Harry, an even-tempered conniver.

As I see it, Manuel is the one great Portuguese filmmaker who has been denied the international acclaim he is due (something I am confident the Viennale will help to redress). Nor am I the only one who feels strongly for him and his films. The two key figures of 60s filmmaking in Portugal and pioneers of its modern cinema are closely linked to his work: Fernando Lopes (*Belarmino*, 1963) asked him to make his first, hour-long, film for Portuguese television, *Um Passo, Outro Passo e Depois...* and Paulo Rocha (*Os Verdes Anos*, 1962) took on the production costs for Manuel's second film *Xavier*, which, for lack of money, awaited completion for many years.

Xavier was shot in 1991 but not finished until 2002 – a period during which Pedro Costa and Teresa Villaverde, who are now far better-known internationally, began making films, as did a number of other Portuguese directors who have since disappeared without trace (Joaquim Pinto, Victor Gonçalves, Daniel del-Negro, Ana Luísa



'...quando troveja'

Guimarães...). Of this phantom generation, Mozos was the most prolific. This is because, even though *Xavier* was not released for many years, a fact that was to profoundly affect his career, Manuel continued making films, in the area of documentary filmmaking.

In 1994, with *Lisboa No Cinema*, he embarked on a series of films on Portuguese cinema for which, in a wonderfully subversive manoeuvre, he appropriated the images and cinema of others in order to allow him to go on making his films. His obsessive rapport with Portuguese cinema can be seen in the extraordinary documentary *Cinema Português?*. In 2008, Mozos returned to features with *4 Copas*, a project that is generally regarded as less ambitious and less personal than his earlier works, but in which we still recognise the dignity and the frustration of the characters that the director has introduced us to. In the context of contemporary Portuguese cinema, these characters seem almost anachronistic – and all the more beautiful for it.

After that, Manuel largely focused on documentaries (not entirely of his own volition; he failed to get funding for a feature entitled *Ramiro*). Among the montage films, artists' portraits – on a contemporary musician, a writer and a fado singer – and films on national Portuguese cinema commissioned by the Portuguese Film Institute, for which Manuel now works, one film particularly stands out: the brilliant and unique documentary *Ruínas* (2009), an essay full of ghosts, about a country that cannot shed its memories.

Overall, we are talking about an oeuvre moulded by financial distress, and thus one that tells us about the compulsion to fail: the failure of the country and of Portuguese cinema, the failure of Mozos's generation and of Mozos the filmmaker. That such failure may constitute a chief contribution to contemporary Portuguese art and culture may seem paradoxical – except to those who get the chance to see Manuel's films. Because Manuel Mozos is a filmmaker who, for reasons of romanticism, will remain a phantom, but one we cannot ignore. For if we do, the phantoms will be ourselves. 📺



Translated by Christine Wagner.
This article first appeared in the
Viennale 2012 catalogue



GATE OF HELL

[JIGOKUMON]

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KINUGASA

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BLOWING IN THE WIND

A unique fusion of post-1968 melancholy, embryonic video technology and real-life romance is rescued from the vaults

By Adrian Martin

Anna: the name of a film, and also the only name we have for the person who is its subject, its veritable star for three and three-quarter hours. It is a good guess that almost no one who sees this remarkable Italian film from 1975 will have the slightest clue where Anna came from before appearing in it, or where she went afterwards. Or whether she – or the child she bore during the making of the movie – is even still alive.

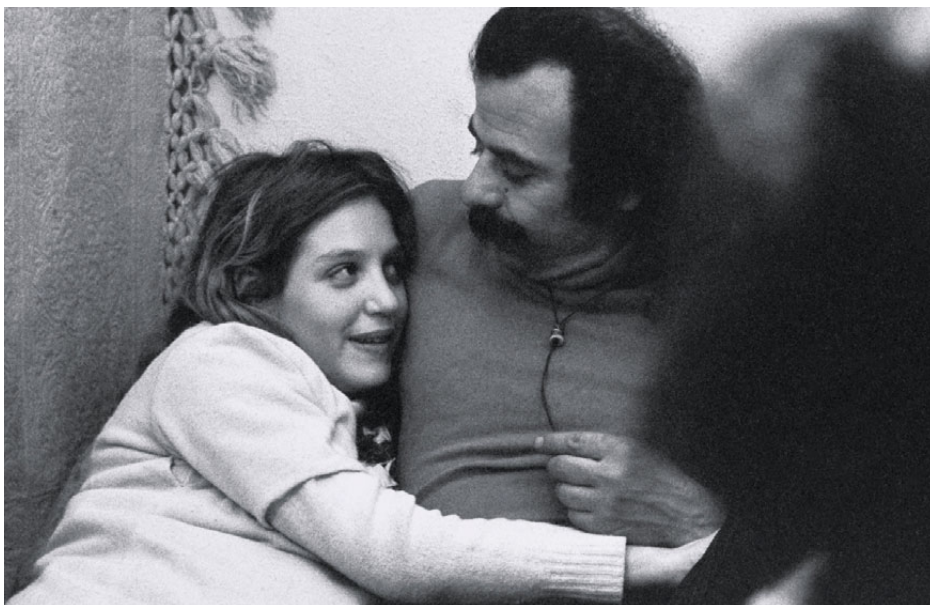
Anna has effectively disappeared into the images and sounds of this film; it absorbs not only her name but also something of her fragility and instability. In its materiality, *Anna* reflects the type of 'bare life' experienced by marginalised individuals, a life of which Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has spoken so eloquently.

Anna came about as a kind of accident. The opening scenes play catch-up, re-enacting the encounter of co-director Massimo Sarchielli with this waif of the streets – pregnant, homeless, spaced-out on drugs – in Rome's Piazza Navona. Sarchielli, a gregarious hippie, takes her in and looks after her, with a small crew recording some remarkably intimate scenes. But this is also a fiercely political work: it spends as much time on the various protests and heated discussions going on in the Piazza as it does on the interpersonal story.

Indoors, Anna is the object of a fantasy-investment: everyone wants her to embody the newborn revolution of the sub-proletariat. The camera accordingly gazes at her as if she were some kind of angel or gift – both the sign of the real world that most people live in every day and the hope for its better future. Anna, however, remains steadfastly detached from this radical passion: her main goal is simply to survive. And the more we observe her, the more we realise how canny and cagey she may really be, using the filmmakers as much as they are using her.

There have been many fiction films dramatising the disillusionment that followed the upheavals and breakthroughs of the 1960s, from Godard-Gorin's *Tout va bien* (1972) and Eustache's *La Maman et la Putain* (1973) to Garrel's *Regular Lovers* (2005) and Assayas's *Something in the Air* (2012). But no movie captures the nervous energy, the air of paranoia, the knotty debates of the time like *Anna*. Here you can really see the corrosive effects of what Gilles Deleuze called the "society of control": cops, politicians and doctors form a dark, oppressive, ominously interconnected backdrop to the efforts of these activists.

Time has claimed both Sarchielli (1931-2010) and his co-director Alberto Grifi (1938-2007). Grifi was an artist who worked with such cross-media giants of his time as Carmelo Bene and Gianfranco Baruchello; Sarchielli was best known as a colourful character



Chance encounter: Anna and the film's co-director, Massimo Sarchielli, who met her on the street

actor, crossing paths with everyone from Fellini and Dario Argento to Skolimowski and Spike Lee. But they might have both remained phantoms buried in a few Wikipedia pages if not for the digital technology that has now returned their film to us.

Grifi and Sarchielli were themselves working at a precarious juncture of technological change: *Anna* was shot using the first open-reel video recorder available in Italy. They embraced the new possibilities this offered for working with extended duration. *Anna* could easily have gone the way of much early video art: disintegrated, inaccessible, unviewable on contemporary players. But Grifi had a blessed intuition: he invented a machine that allowed him to transfer video reels to 16mm. It is this footage that provided the basis for a digital restoration by the Cineteca di Bologna.

For once, this restoration is not a meddling 'clean-up' operation. The rawness of the video material – as well as the randomness

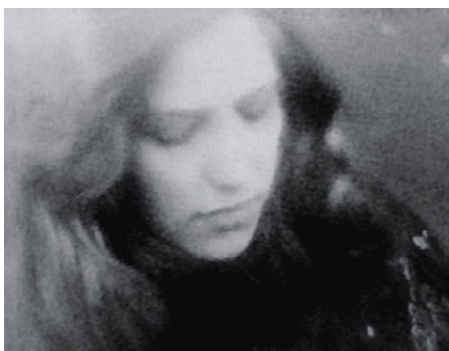
of what gets picked up by the roving, unidirectional microphone – is respected in all its glitchy flares, drop-outs and handheld chaos. The result goes beyond Warhol, beyond Michael Snow: with its grainy faces and half-captured voices, *Anna* is a heady mixture of the abstract and the concrete, of documentary banality with the heightened melodrama of a lived, spontaneous fiction.

And, of all the faces caught on the fly in this film, there is one, especially haunting, that threatens to usurp Anna from her starring position, because it concludes the movie in a long, painful take and, once viewed, can never be forgotten. Vincenzo Mazza was part of the crew on *Anna*. He eventually stepped out from the shadows, as it were, and entered the onscreen story – by declaring his love for Anna and beginning a relationship with her. But this love went wrong and Anna eventually abandoned him.

For Mazza, this spelled more than a personal defeat: he speaks of it as the end of the revolution itself, the extinguishing of an era, the betrayal of its hopes. He thought, he tells us in this finale, that social change could be gentle, poetic, beautiful; instead, he has learned only that life is cruel and that – as they suspected before the revolution – society is horrible, and will win out every time. According to research uncovered by Rachel Kushner in *Artforum*, Mazza himself disappeared from the face of the earth only a few short years later: he was killed in a street brawl by (of all people) the brother of actor Gian Maria Volonté. Like Anna herself, Vincenzo has become a creature of grain and pixels, a scrap of reality caught in the unruly net fashioned by Grifi and Sarchielli.

Anna is a film devoted to all that is precarious – lives, destinies, material conditions, political programmes, artistic representations – but the miracle is that it has survived every one of these ravages and can seize us as directly and poignantly today as in 1975, if not even more so. 

The camera gazes on Anna as if she were some kind of angel or gift – both sign of the real world and hope for a better future



'Anna'

RESTLESS REINVENTION

The multifaceted oeuvre of octogenarian Argentinian avant-gardiste Narcisa Hirsch finally received its due at the Viennale

By Olaf Möller

Despite a multifaceted body of work comprising several dozen films created over more than 40 years, Narcisa Hirsch was 84 before she received her first invitation to a major international film festival. The most facile explanation for this would be that Hirsch creates the kind of works commonly called experimental, in a nation not known for this variety of cinema: Argentina. Avant-garde literature or painting, sure, but not cinema – even if such work does exist. Yet looking at the attention paid to all kinds of unofficial filmmaking there, especially during the country's violent 1970s – the very years when interest in Hirsch was at its all-time high – it is astonishing that she never really made even a blip. That, at least, was the puzzled consensus reached by a Viennale audience offered but a glimpse of Hirsch's oeuvre; at Bafici, last April, Buenos Aires got to see more from their local artist.

So why now? One reason may be that in 2011 Hirsch finished a longer work of self-reflection: *El mito de Narciso*, which simply

begs for a retrospective context, being made in good part from scenes and sounds from her earlier films. An autobiography in the strict sense it is not, as her life serves solely as a sounding-cum-springboard for other concerns and questions voiced by a narrator; one is tempted to call him an analyst, given the way he sits in front of a screen watching images of Hirsch at different ages, which seem to evoke memories of her films as well as further material she shot, taped or appropriated, like an interview with Hans-Jürgen Syberberg or a scene from his *Ein Traum, was sonst* (1994).

In fact, during the last two decades or so, many of Hirsch's works were created from pre-existing films, making *El mito de Narciso* something like Hirsch's remix of remixes. Some, like *Testamento y Vida Interior* (super-8 original 1976, revised video version 2001) or *Ama-zona* (super-8 original 1983, revised video version 2001), were partly re-edited and rescored, and are now usually presented in these versions; others, like *El Aleph* (2005), are entirely new pieces created from old material. Call it restless re-invention, an obsession with self-development, an almost existential need to rewrite one's life over and over. Sound praxis in itself, but with one deplorable downside: as Hirsch felt forced to turn towards video and then digital, the image and sound quality suffered. The unique splendour of

her super-8 works in particular is now a pale shadow of its original self; some of the rough edges that make for the glory of super 8 have been smoothed away in the process too.

Looking at *Ama-zona* now is a strange experience: the intensely alive grain of the original super-8 material seems to fight against the deterioration of the video material; a clash of textures that makes the film, the experience, more cerebral, less emotional. Considering that sensuality is so important to Hirsch, it's irritating that she's willing to forfeit that dimension. Then again, nowadays she tends to be more interested in making sense of (her) images than creating them; she wants to get a grip on their potential meaning(s), which might be easier when they're not quite as seductive; at least that's the way it looks and feels. Anyway, Hirsch knows how to create pure visual pleasure even under these circumstances. Just marvel at a moment early in *El mito de Narciso* when an image of a man rowing across a glistening blue lake from *Ama-zona* slowly dissolves into a photograph, ostensibly of the Hirsch family circa the 1910s or 20s: the faces first look like stones barely visible under the water, then suddenly background turns into foreground and they seem to suck the landscape up. It's eerie, this sense of the past first haunting, then devouring the now.

The few things one learns about Narcisa



Political movement: in 'Aída', a dancer's moves in a living-room could be seen as hinting at the limited opportunities for public expression in 1970s Argentina



Narcisa Hirsch

Hirsch in *El mito de Narciso* are as follows (and even some of this is merely hinted at): she is German by birth (a Berliner, to be exact), the daughter of a painter (the Expressionist Heinrich Heuser); she spent time in Austria, some of it lovely, some terrible; her mother left with her for Argentina because of another man. Also: she had a strong attachment to the loving father taken from her early in life, while remaining alienated from a mother who was constantly quarrelling with her own mother. It's quite possible that things were more muddled, but now Hirsch prefers to make sense of them in this archetypal psychoanalytic fashion.

Hirsch was lucky. She left the German-speaking world in the mid-1930s. Her adult life's big question became: what would have happened if they'd stayed? Or, as the film's narrator puts it: "You say strange things. A woman who says that she'll go somewhere else to recognise the life she would've had if she'd stayed in that place." At one point, he suggests that "your mother has practised some sort of resistance – outside Germany". As he speaks, we see Hirsch walking through Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, its maze of stelae. Next comes some Nazi news footage, seen on a TV set in a living room, in which a defendant in court whispers "no" when the rabid judge or prosecutor expects him to state "yes".

Hirsch escaped the horrors of German fascism, but still lived dangerously; Argentina, she now says, has always been in a state of turmoil, on the brink of civil war, its moments of true peace rare. She likes to point out that the lieutenants and generals weren't the only ones exercising quasi-official terror in the 1970s and 80s: left-wing extremists had their own death squads.

That's the atmosphere in which Hirsch started to make films: suspicion, seclusion, agitation, but also a sense of things happening all over the world. Originally, Hirsch was a painter. Impressed by the teachings of a legendary critic who in *echt* 1960s style declared

Nowadays, Hirsch seems more interested in making sense of images she has already created than in making new ones



'Ama-zona'

all classical disciplines of artistic creation void and advocated new, livelier forms of expression like performances and happenings, Hirsch got into the latter; this then led her to film in the late 60s, initially as a recording device. If one looks for 'official' images of that period in her films – the state's as well as the opposition's – you won't find too much; it's a cinema of wilful seclusion. There are exceptions, however. In *Testamento y vida interior*, for example, one sees a funeral procession passing through what looks like a small town but could just as well be the outskirts of Buenos Aires; what's remarkable about the set-up is the feeling of watching a performance – signifying what? It's 1976, so there aren't that many possibilities. But moments like these are few and far apart.

The people one sees in this shot are mainly filmmakers who, like Hirsch, belonged to a loose group of likeminded cine-artists. It would be too much to call them oppositional, yet the authorities (of which Argentina has known many since 1966) kept an eye on them. In Hirsch's recollection, they were never really harassed, as their allegory-heavy works weren't conceived as clear and present dangers; still, being impossible to read in an unambiguous fashion, they made some people nervous.

The inwardness of, say, *Taller* (1975) – which consists of only one shot showing parts of a wall while Hirsch describes the rest of the room to a visitor from afar – can easily be read as an expression of life in confinement, even if today it plays more like a shining example of 70s self-reflexive filmmaking at its most minimalist. A similar line of reasoning can be applied to *Aída* (super-8 original 1976, revised digital version 2012), in which a dancer exhausts herself in what looks like a middle-class living-room, as if passions could exist only in private, all things bodily and glorious about women and men exiled from the sphere of public life. *Rumi* (1995-99) plays like an expanded version of that, with its window shutters being drawn up again and again, yearningly; the culminating, trance-inducing Sufi dance is jubilantly superimposed on a landscape of lush trees and mist-capped hills. But this is long after the dictatorship has been overthrown; Argentina's troubles were of a rather different nature by then – but still, the image of people closed away, desires suppressed, remains. And that is truly disturbing. ☹

NEWS AND EVENTS

● **On Vanishing Land** is the title of Justin Barton and Mark Fisher's latest sound-film, a sequel to their highly acclaimed audio-essay 'londonunderlondon', which opens at the Showroom Gallery on 5 February. The latest piece is inspired by the East Anglian landscape as well as films shot on location there. Constructed around a walk through a striking area of Suffolk coastland, a terrain pervaded by a sense of the eerie, the piece explores the connections between the ghost stories of M.R. James and Brian Eno's 1982 album 'On Land'. The music track for 'On Vanishing Land' consists of work by musicians and sound artists including Burial, John Foxx, Baron Mordant, Ekoplekz and Skjolbrot. www.theshowroom.org

● **Gerard Byrne** is the subject of a major survey at the Whitechapel Gallery from 17 January to 8 March, the first in the UK. Byrne explores the way we build our understanding of the present through reconstructing the past. His films revisit historic moments and conversations, ranging from an interview with Jean-Paul Sartre to a conversation between Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov about the future. This exhibition will include seven major film installations and the UK premiere of his last multi-screen installation, 'A man and a woman make love'. www.whitechapelgallery.org



● **Film in Space** is an exhibition of film and expanded cinema at Camden Arts Centre selected by British artist-filmmaker Guy Sherwin, which runs from 15 December to 24 February. Sherwin predominantly focuses on work by British filmmakers associated with the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, such as Malcolm le Grice, Gil Eatherley, William Raban and Annabel Nicolson, but has also selected films to show alongside them by younger artists such as Simon Payne and Lucy Reynolds as well as examples of his own works, such as his recent 'Abrasion Loops' (pictured above). www.camdenartscentre.org

● **Beatrice Gibson's 'The Tiger's Mind'** is an abstract thriller set against the backdrop of a brutalist villa. Six characters, the set, the music, the Foley, the special effects, the narrator and the author battle one another for control of the film as it unfolds on screen. The score is by radical British composer Cornelius Cardew. The film is screened in the Roger Stevens TV studio in the University of Leeds from 21 November to 17 January, and at the Showroom Gallery from 14 November to 12 January. www.theshowroom.org

THE TELLER NOT THE TALE

The role of the 'film explainer' died out with the coming of sound. A new documentary traces its revival in today's East Africa

By Frances Morgan

In Gert Hofmann's novel *The Film Explainer*, the young protagonist's grandfather, who scrapes a living narrating and providing musical accompaniment for silent films in his local cinema, is already a relic of a past era, with intertitles commonplace and sound films soon to arrive in even the most provincial theatres. The book is set in the early 1930s, in Limbach, Germany; the backdrop is therefore economic depression and the rise of fascism, but Hofmann resists drawing too stark a contrast between the fantasy world of the cinema and the harsh realities outside. The cinema itself is a place of contrasts. Karl, the explainer, is an anxious, extrovert figure with something of the carnival showman about him. He's a self-taught chancer who improvises piano music to accompany films and competitively expands his vocabulary using old newspapers and a school encyclopedia. But his relationship with the silent films he explains is as contemplative as it is showy. His descriptions are not just of plot but also of composition – lighting, a character's stance, the positioning of props, the fall of a sleeve – thus pausing rather than moving along the action. Here, the explainer invites us to watch and listen closely, so that "the scene was there twice over: to hear and to look at".

However evocative this sounds, it's hard not to agree with the cinema's owner, who describes the explainer's role as akin to a "third nostril"; and Karl's response, that there'll always be film explainers, sounds like hubris. Yet a documentary screened at London's recent Film Africa festival recasts the role of the explainer in a very modern story about globalisation, language and copyright. *Veejays in Dar es Salaam* is a German-made film about East Africa's present-day film explainers, whose role is to interpret not silent films but American and Asian blockbusters.

Originating in the disco era, the term VJ (the video equivalent of 'disc jockey') is one most often associated with music – either an anonymous figure who creates real-time syntheses of sound and visuals for performance, or your MTV announcer, mixing and announcing pop videos. In the semi-legal video halls of the Tanzanian capital, the role seems somewhat similar to that of the dancehall deejay in Jamaica, whose role is not to spin records but to sing and rap over them – at least, that's what first comes to mind when watching rapid-fire DJ Mark, Bollywood specialist Juma Khan and veteran translator Derek Mukandala, aka Lufufu, commandeer microphones and mixing desks in front of temporary screens and TVs to not only narrate a film but also promote themselves, their prowess on the mic and their video shops, where illegally dubbed VHS tapes and DVDs



Man of his word: an appetite for Hollywood doesn't equate to simple acceptance of dominant values

can be bought. The veejays are also translators, painstakingly converting international films into Swahili; their USP, though, is to add their own twist by inserting commentary that grounds the film for local audiences and brings out comedic aspects that were not intended by, say, James Cameron when he made *Titanic* (one of the films we see narrated). While there's a huge demand for Hollywood films, the attitude towards them isn't exactly reverent: the veejay's narration seems to affectionately skewer those bombastic, epic edifices that blockbuster directors spend so much time and money constructing. While East Africa's homegrown film output is still small, the veejays' editing, criticising and re-interpreting of international films shows a determination to create their own narratives rather than accept at face value the dominant ones of the global media.

Ironically, while some of *Veejays in Dar es Salaam*'s subjects speak English, all are subtitled, and on my viewing these subtitles – especially those that were translations of translations – felt stilted and unsatisfactory. Perhaps this is what happens when multiple translations pile up, or it might be due to a careful ethnographic approach that loses colloquialisms and the feel of language in

Tanzanian veejays translate films into Swahili but also insert irreverent commentary with relevance to local audiences

favour of precision. But equally, the prosaic subtitles are a reminder of how film explaining, while it can be playful and performative in Uganda and Tanzania, has also been viewed as a compromise at best and at worst, as



The art of benshi: 'Orochi'

Donald Richie writes in *Japanese Cinema*, “the major obstacle to cinematic technique”.

Richie is writing specifically of the Japanese *benshi*, which he compares to other narrators of early cinema – the French *compère*, for example – but which had a more enduring popularity and indeed celebrity than their counterparts elsewhere. He puts this down to Japanese filmgoers’ desire for “complete instruction”, which perhaps belies the other reasons audiences might have warmed to a *benshi*. Those who became famous, most notably Musei Tokugawa, had a role beyond that of the purely didactic: they were charismatic public figures who were so well known for their particular interpretations (narratives known as *setsumei*) that, according to historian Jeffrey Dym, these were sometimes performed without the film.

Like Hofmann’s explainer, some *benshi* would have had their roots in vaudeville and pre-cinema forms of entertainment, so it’s easy to see why they were popular with audiences who remembered those forms, but also why they represented a threat to progress – and in particular the realism that would come to characterise Japanese film. Silent London recently presented *Orochi* (1925) with a *benshi* narration, but if we watch silent film in 2012, it’s likely to be soundtracked by an experimental new musical score rather than any kind of verbal narration. For most people, music is easier to tune in and out than words; it’s more ambiguous, amorphous, easily shaped to the contours of the visual.

If explanatory accompaniments to film have faded over time, now relegated mostly to optional DVD commentaries, we are well used to non-naturalistic devices like voiceovers, as long as they happen within the frame and not live and clamouring in the auditorium. But the appearance of an overt storyteller in a film is still a rarity. Writing about the rerelease of Bill Douglas’s *Comrades* in 2009, Shelia Rowbotham criticised the character of the lanternist, who frames the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs with magic-lantern shows, dioramas, thaumatropes and other pre-cinema illusions, as an “awkward external device”, as if he were an old-style silent explainer preventing the viewer from full sensory immersion in the film. I’ve always thought that’s precisely what he’s supposed to be: a reminder that history is subjective and illusory – and film more so. 📽



Ur explainer: the lanternist in ‘Comrades’

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

The digital realm is a boon to early-cinema aficionados, facilitating viewings, discussions and rediscoveries.



By Pamela Hutchinson

The relationship between the world-wide web and the cinema grows ever closer but remains uneasy. While some in the studios may regard the online world as a trap lined with revenue-draining torrent sites, for film fans the web offers conversation, information and, legally or otherwise, content. But there are mutual benefits to be shared; as Tim Berners-Lee’s brainchild is still itself an unsettled twentysomething, it is only right that it has most to offer the earliest years of filmmaking.

At first glance, getting your silent-cinema fix online seems like a misguided quirk, the equivalent of using your smartphone to post faux-Polaroids on Instagram. Indeed, there is a strand of retro film fandom that manifests itself in Tumblr and Pinterest sites chock full of images and gifs of Roscoe Arbuckle and Theda Bara. Stills, magazine scans and studio portraits are ‘repinned’ and ‘liked’ by fans who may admire the films, the stars, the vintage chic of shingled hair and dropped waists, or all three.

But some of those scrapbook pictures link to blogs where the films are earnestly discussed and analysed. The quality of discourse varies, but the more specialist the topic, the more precious the web’s ability to facilitate conversation across continents. Forums such as Nitrateville.com host impassioned, wide-ranging debates, as well as being useful places to post announcements of screenings or pick a fellow enthusiast’s brain. The UK website TheBioscope.net recently closed, but its scholarly posts remain online. If it’s data you crave, Silentera.com provides release dates, home-video updates and footage lengths. And if you’ll hold the jokes about the sound of silence, there are early-cinema podcasts ranging from audio essays to chattier, discussion-based formats. My own site, SilentLondon.co.uk, was founded as a place to post listings for screenings. As it has grown, it has formed an online community – on social media and on the website itself – united by a passion for silent cinema, with no need for a London postcode.

The web is not just a place to talk about films. It’s also increasingly a place to watch them. Confusion or carelessness about copyright creates the belief that silents are in the public domain and their presence on videosharing sites legitimate. The reality is more complex, of course, but qualms about legality or even quality are easily overcome by the temptation of easy access. Fans frustrated by awaiting DVD releases are always liable to fall on chunk-by-chunk uploads on YouTube or Vimeo. And a staggering number of silent films and clips are available to view this way.

In clearer waters, viewers can stream public-domain titles on Archive.org, and the BFI and Library of Congress have their own YouTube channels brimming with early cinema. The BFI even achieved the web’s holy

grail in 2010 when its (watermarked) upload of Cecil Hepworth’s 1903 *Alice in Wonderland* went viral. “It’s over 100 years old!” marvelled Hollywood gossip blogger Perez Hilton.

Many archives post highlights of their collections on their own sites, accompanied by detailed notes, still with the aim of reaching a mass audience. “Warning!” boasts the British Pathé online archive’s Twitter feed. “Our videos are highly addictive!” EuropaFilmTreasures.eu, which houses uploads from several European archives, is a particularly rich seam; like the British UnionSearch.bfi.org.uk, which offers access to footage from several regional collections, it’s open without subscription. Why shouldn’t the next funny cat video to go viral be ‘Polidor ed i Gatti’ (1913) or ‘The Sick Kitten’ (1903)?

No one would claim a laptop, tablet or TV is the ideal platform for a film, and silent-cinema enthusiasts in particular will advocate the live experience of a cinema screening with music. But viewing an early short – a few minutes long and filmed in Academy ratio – online is arguably less unpleasant than attempting to settle in for a 90-minute talking feature letterboxed on your PC.

More productively, online conversation can aid the rediscovery of films thought to be lost. With so many silent films unaccounted for, archivists are keen to identify any unlabelled fragments in their stores. Lost-Films.eu posts images and descriptions of unidentified films, inviting users to help identify nitrate scraps in archives around the world, and has notched up some successes.

If you can’t unravel a mystery, you can always put your hand in your pocket. On crowdfunding sites Indiegogo and Kickstarter you’ll find people soliciting money, often successfully, for the production of new silent films or the restoration and preservation of old ones. These digital campaigns tap into the social networks of web-based fan communities and the growing number of film historians working online.

The web, then, is being used not just to raise the demand for silent cinema by allowing fans to share their enthusiasm, but to increase the supply as well. Which is indeed a link worth following. 📽



Going viral: ‘Alice in Wonderland’ (1903)

PLAYING IT COOL

Has Abel Ferrara been punished for his refusal to subscribe to the too-cool-for-school sensibility of von Trier and the Coens?



By Brad Stevens

In his 1956 book on Rimbaud, *The Time of the Assassins*, Henry Miller describes contemporary poets as “locked in their glorified little

egos; they hold themselves aloof from the world for fear of being shattered at the first contact. They are not even personal, when one gets right down to it, for if they were we might understand their torment and delirium, such as it is.” What Miller describes here is surely the characteristic that distinguishes so many of our most widely admired filmmakers: that desire to escape the confusions of human interaction and retreat into a private artistic realm where emotional involvement is admitted only to the extent that it can be relentlessly mocked.

The essential difference between modernism and postmodernism is that for the former narrative is a problem, whereas for the latter narrative is a joke. The idea of responding unironically to the activities of fictional individuals has now been exposed as a hoax, and it is hardly surprising that the Coen brothers, Wes Anderson, Michael Haneke and Jim Jarmusch enjoy widespread acclaim from commentators of the ‘hip’ variety. In their different ways, these directors portray ‘cool’ detachment as an ideal we should all aspire to, expressing superiority towards not only their characters but also those viewers who fail to comprehend that both the characters and those narrative structures that make them available to us are nothing more than empty signifiers.

Artists who refuse to follow this trend, whose work is notable for its absence of postmodern posturing, have inevitably paid the price critically and commercially. Why else have Abel Ferrara’s last eight films received only marginal exposure in the US and so far failed to find any kind of UK distribution, even on DVD? One might profitably compare Ferrara’s most recent feature *4:44 Last Day on Earth* (2011) with two other films that also deal with the end of the world, Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011) and Gregg Araki’s *Kaboom* (2010).

Von Trier’s postmodernism is the kind that allows uninitiated viewers to take his mimicking of European arthouse cinema’s high seriousness at face value (audience members at Cannes who jeered *Antichrist*’s dedication to Tarkovsky seem to have recognised the disparity between von Trier and his models without quite getting the joke), just like those poor dumb schmucks who thought he was in earnest when claiming to be a Nazi, or were offended by *Breaking the Waves*’s combination of misogyny and religiosity. Of course, anyone on von Trier’s wavelength will understand that he doesn’t mean any of this – that the Nazi comment was simply an attack on bourgeois



And now the end is near: Willem Dafoe and Shannyn Leigh in Abel Ferrara’s ‘4:44 Last Day on Earth’

good taste, that ideological tendencies that may appear reactionary are actually being ridiculed (though what are really subjected to ridicule are the cinematic codes by which values of any kind are communicated, rather than the values themselves). It is surely significant that the overt meanings that works in this tradition somehow manage to convey without apparently intending to are usually on the right of the political spectrum.

Kaboom is at least more honest in unambiguously pandering to a youth audience that considers itself too cool for school. But for all its energy, Araki’s film seems ultimately pessimistic in the way it views everything through a prism of irony. *Kaboom*’s narrative exists in quotation marks – we are not supposed to take the conspiracy plot any more seriously than we are to take the Earth’s destruction (an event that abruptly concludes the film, like the punchline to a joke) – and this insistence on portraying storytelling as a suspect activity goes hand in hand with a depiction of people as cartoonish figures who – though some of them represent positions to which Araki clearly subscribes – can neither be embraced nor rejected.

Neither of these films could accommodate the sequence in *4:44* in which a character who initially appears peripheral – a young Asian delivering fast food – is suddenly transformed into a complex individual bidding farewell to his family in Vietnam via Skype. *4:44* responds well to the formula I suggested in last month’s column, being explicitly concerned with performance as a theme. In this it functions as a companion piece to Ferrara’s *Go Go Tales* (2007): in both films Willem Dafoe plays a

man whose ‘onstage’ performances are crude and solipsistic but whose ‘offstage’ roles are distinguished by complex gestures of generosity and communality. In *Go Go Tales* the stage is a literal one, whereas in *4:44* it takes the form of the roof balcony on which Cisco (Dafoe) delivers a series of incoherent monologues full of self-pity and bitterness. Here, Cisco is an inert role-player, whereas in those offstage spaces where he is obliged to interact with friends, family and casual acquaintances, he becomes a subtle improviser, constantly attentive to others’ needs. Ferrara frequently juxtaposes his lead ‘actors’ with characters who have withdrawn behind performative facades (the prototype being *The Driller Killer*’s Tony Coca-Cola); here the role is incarnated by Cisco’s brother Noah (Paul Hipp), who uses stylish gestures and calculated anecdotes to dominate social situations. It is obvious that, in his solitary rooftop speeches, Cisco is unsuccessfully trying to imitate his brother – his failure to do this being precisely the reason he retains Ferrara’s interest.

Of course, Noah would be the hero of a film by Jarmusch or the Coens, who regard the ability to maintain a ‘cool’ surface as the ne plus ultra of social interaction. And this perhaps explains why their work has been widely distributed during a period when Ferrara’s has gone into eclipse. The most moving images in *4:44* involve people going about their daily activities in the face of imminent annihilation, with Cisco’s partner Skye (Shannyn Leigh) continuing to work on a painting during the final minutes of life on earth. The emphasis is on art as an activity that is continuous with more ‘mundane’ activities but divorced from judgements as to its ultimate value. Whether he is dealing with life or creativity, Ferrara focuses on the doing rather than the done, the process rather than the result – an approach unlikely to prove popular at a time when our arbiters of cultural taste all too often privilege films that shut down experience rather than open it up. 9

Artists whose work is notable for its absence of postmodern posturing have paid a price, critically and commercially

'I'VE NEVER SEEN IT UNTIL NOW...'

Murder, romance, a train-hopping Louise Brooks and real-life hobos all play their part in the little-seen 1928 masterpiece *Beggars of Life*

By Neil Brand

A starving hobo approaches a farmhouse, from which emanates the delicious smell of breakfast; looking through the mesh door, he sees the farmer seated at the breakfast table. He knocks, enters and begs for some of the food. The man doesn't turn and as the hobo moves closer we see the blood congealing on the floor, the man's unseeing eyes and the weeping bullet-wound in his temple. That is the immediately gripping opening of William Wellman's 1928 film *Beggars of Life*.

In the early 1990s we had an enviable collection of silent prints in the UK: Griffith, British cinema, German Expressionism, Soviet and European avant garde. However, Hollywood was something again: you just couldn't get the rank-and-file pictures, the non-classics, the B movies, outside the NFT or Reading Film Theatre seasons. Importing prints from the US was an expensive business and seldom financially viable for a silent. So in terms of silent cinema, what you saw here was largely what resided here. And upon that, the canon rested.

Beggars of Life exists in one scratched, duplicated, 16mm positive print lodged in the 1950s with the George Eastman House archive in Rochester, New York – because that's where the film's star, Louise Brooks, lived for the last years of her life, courtesy of the archive's founding curator (and her lover) James Card. So, pre-digital, if you wanted to see *Beggars*, you had to be in the room where that print was showing. Its lack of visibility has been a tragedy. And don't expect to own it any time soon, as it is a long way down any list of planned restorations and DVD releases Paramount may have in mind, the state of the surviving materials making it an expensive and largely thankless proposition.

The notoriously tough director 'Wild' Bill Wellman turned to *Beggars of Life* in 1928 after the Oscar-winning *Wings*, and employed one of that film's stars, Richard Arlen, as the hobo juvenile lead. Arlen responded with a superbly understated performance. The film is astonishing on several fronts, not least in appearing to be Depression-era before the Depression, life on the road being depicted with an eye for detail and a harsh, flat realism that would have suited later social-realist films like *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* or *The Grapes of Wrath*. Its view of human relationships is no more romantic: Louise Brooks, disguised as a man to duck the law after her murder of the farmer who tried to rape her, is the sexual target for every man she comes across. Arlen's character sees her initially only as a burden he doesn't need; their first night together under a haystack only thaws minutely when they realise that each understands the other's ambitions. Their love ultimately blossoms



A night under a haystack: Richard Arlen and Louise Brooks in 'Beggars of Life'

With its eye for detail and harsh, flat realism, the film appears to be Depression-era before the Depression

convincingly against the odds, even flooring Wallace Beery's cynical *über*-hobo, who has the line: "I've heard about it but I've never seen it until now." Such wry moments work as well with audiences today as they did in 1928.

Perhaps most astonishing for this 'small' film (the running time of the surviving material is less than 75 minutes) is the breadth of both its canvas and its ambitions. The 1924 autobiographical source novel by Hollywood pressman Jim Tully detailed the boxcar-riding, bull-dodging and fights with the Midwestern railways' hobo gangs that had been the author's

life in the first years of the century. Wellman shot the film almost entirely on location in Carrizo Gorge in California's Jacumba Mountains, transporting the cast and crew up the canyons on the same train he was using for his shots – for which it was variously crammed with trigger-happy government agents, allowed to run loose through the line's vertiginously tight curves, and set careering spectacularly into a ravine for the film's climax. The wrecked train is still there. He also hired 20 'real' hobos for the whole shoot, letting them loose in the evenings on the bars and pool halls of Jacumba. Brooks describes it all with her usual dry wit in her autobiography *Lulu in Hollywood*.

Add to all this Beery's buccaneering performance as Oklahoma Red – literally judge, jury and executioner of his hobo gang – Bob Perry's reptilian Arkansas Snake, moistly removing his dentures before a particularly vicious set-to, and Brooks performing her own train-hopping stunts and demanding no concessions to her stunning femininity in men's clothes, and you have a masterpiece that has ducked the epithet this long through sheer invisibility.

I first saw *Beggars of Life* four years ago at a festival in Munich and knew it would be perfect for myself and the blues/skiffle band the Dodge Brothers to concoct an Americana soundtrack to. Although its original fame stemmed from its status as the first film Paramount released with spoken dialogue, a few lines of which were added to the recorded music track, the film's original soundtrack does not survive. Were it not for that 16mm print, neither would the film itself. However, what I and the Dodges have played alongside a good few times now is a less precious Digibeta copy of the print – one positive outcome of increasing digitisation, and a small step towards wider appreciation. And every time it plays, *Beggars of Life* unfailingly works its rough, footsore but heartfelt magic. 

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

"It is a rather dull and unimaginative piece of work, which is largely confined to scenes of tramps hopping freight trains... It is a picture that might have been infinitely better handled, for William Wellman, who is responsible for the direction, reveals but little intimate knowledge of his subject... One hears Wallace Beery as Oklahoma Red, through the medium of the Vitaphone, refer to his companions as 'jungle buzzards'... but the film gives one no absorbingly interesting incidents connected with the hoboes' existence... There are some good scenes of trains, but whether they afford entertainment is another matter. Louise Brooks figures as Nancy. [She] really acts well, better than she has in most of her other pictures."

Mordaunt Hall, 'The New York Times', 24 September 1928

TALKING POINTS

PERSISTENCE OF VISION

It looks as though 2012 will go down in history as the year in which, after well over a century of continuity, mainstream exhibitors finally turned their backs on 35mm projection and embraced digital presentation of feature films. But what are the implications for those of us who cherish the film image *per se*? In this email conversation, the British critic and programmer Neil Young and the US-based critic and curator Gabe Klinger discuss whether there's a future for celluloid projection, and what outlets still remain for it



Light entertainment: Stanley Kubrick demonstrates a hands-on connection with 35mm film strips

Neil Young: I was in Vienna attending the Viennale [Vienna International Film Festival] when I got the email from *S&S* inviting us to reflect on how “2012 really was the year when celluloid disappeared”, in a piece that would “mark that loss”. You were at the Viennale as well, Gabe, and that’s a festival where it is very much possible to see numerous features every day from celluloid prints.

That’s because the Viennale is led by Hans Hurch, and the Austrian Film Museum [where the parallel Retrospective takes place] by Alex Horwath, and both men are very much committed to showing films in their original format, wherever possible. But of course not everyone can get to a festival like the Viennale, and for many people 2012 might well have been the moment when they lost touch with celluloid, because so many first-run and multiplex cinemas in North America, Europe and beyond made the decisive switch from 35mm to digital formats.

I regard it as a battle that’s been lost after a token struggle, but to proclaim a ‘death’ of celluloid strikes me as unnecessarily apocalyptic. And as David Bordwell noted in February, “35mm motion-picture release prints haven’t had a celluloid base for about fifteen years. Release prints are on mylar, a polyester-based medium.” So, as a fellow devotee of projected film, do you share my optimism?

Gabe Klinger: The term celluloid is symbolic. We’re still talking about perforated strips of pliable material containing individual images. The other day I had the experience of walking into a department store and seeing discarded film ribbons used to adorn gift-wrapped boxes. I find this interesting. Part of the reason the film strip is used in such a way has to do with the materiality we value so much: it’s shiny and beautiful and reminds us of the shared experience of moviegoing. We haven’t totally divorced from that in 2012.

Film may have left the multiplex, but it

hasn’t vanished just yet – least of all in the places where people still care for (archives) and about it (cinematheques). I don’t believe the Lumières’ train has reached its final destination. For better or worse, festivals like the Viennale and institutions like the Austrian Film Museum have been transformed into activist organisations, in the sense that they are rebelling against corporations by continuing to insist on showing film prints. (Peter Kubelka’s astounding double-35mm-projector performance of *Arnulf Rainer* and *Antiphon* at this year’s Viennale is an example.) Unfortunately these small organisations can’t do all the heavy lifting on their own. As in most other sectors of industry, it’s the giant corporations that will have the final say.

NY: This ‘giant corporations’ angle is what’s led people to pronounce 2012 as the ‘end of the line’ in terms of the Lumières’ train, as you neatly put it. Old-school machinery – stick a spanner in if it goes wrong – that kind of stuff.

2011 was apparently the last year that a movie-capable 35mm camera was produced (it'll probably last more than a century, if past form is any guide, however), and 2012 has seen the likes of Kodak and Fuji either ceasing to produce filmstock or announcing its imminent demise. Then of course there are the even bigger commercial organisations such as the ones that own the movie studios, whose attitude towards celluloid is for me summed up by that unreliable rumour about Paramount accidentally trashing the only 70mm negative of *Days of Heaven* after mixing it up with *Days of Thunder*.

What's beyond dispute is that it's become virtually impossible to get any of the Kubrick films on 35mm, let alone 70mm, as Warner Bros only seem to want people to have access to the digital versions. My attitude to that is to just forget about the studios and instead concentrate on supporting, building up and promoting archives held elsewhere: cinematheques, museums, institutions, private collections. These have to become the repositories for the heritage of cinema, if future generations are to have any hope of being able to show film in the original format. And of course the art of projection must also be supported, so that the prints can be kept in the best possible shape while being accessible to interested parties.

In Vienna I was struck by how terrific a 67-year-old print of Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street* looked and sounded (it had the original BBFC certificate at the front), with only the occasional jolt here and there, which certainly didn't detract from the experience. Many digital devotees claim either that the public can't tell the difference, or that DCP [digital cinema package] is actually preferable – but I've never heard of any kind of comparison tests where audiences have been shown a 'reel' of each.

Of course, to be vocal about preferring celluloid in an era when so many aspects of life are hurtling into new stages of digitisation can easily be derided as old-fashioned or even reactionary, and I don't honestly feel like an avatar of traditionalism *per se*.

GK: More than a traditionalist, I'm a practicalist. My 35mm film viewings this year were far less problematic than DCPs, Blu-rays and other digital formats. Everyone says, "These are growing pains. It will get better." But festivals in particular are still struggling to achieve the ideal environment in which the projectionist simply has to enter a screening key and push play. Servers can crash, files can get corrupted – just too many intangibles.

NY: Training of projectionists is absolutely vital, so that they can handle both film and digital. I was stunned that the only 70mm print of *The Master* in the UK had its first reel scratched after only a few days. But that's another story altogether. Projectionists are heroic figures.

GK: Leaving aside projection, part of the problem is the mechanism which allows – or, more importantly, doesn't allow – a digital master to get made. In some corners of the globe, proficient digital technicians are still scarce. The really good post-production houses that can prepare an impeccable DCP

"Film may have left the multiplex, but I don't believe the Lumières' train has reached its final destination." Gabe Klinger

are generally not accessible to micro-budget filmmakers. Ten years ago, if you made a small film in 16mm there was enough supply and demand that made it possible to convince an expert lab to process and time your materials quickly and cheaply. Today you'd kill for that.

NY: And this is a large part of the explanation for James Benning making the switch from celluloid to digital after 2007, when he made *RR* and *Casting a Glance* as a kind of 'farewell' to 16mm. I don't remember hearing anyone cry "Judas!" when his digital debut *Ruhr* made its first appearance, at the Duisburg Film Week three years ago! Benning was in Vienna and he told me he'd made 18 films in the past three years alone! Still, many of his friends in the avant-garde community give him a hard time for 'abandoning' film.

But I wanted to ask about your experiences as a curator this year, sourcing 35mm prints for various festivals. What was the deal with the Brazilian retro you assembled for Rotterdam? That was all film, if I remember rightly. Were there major logistical issues that had to be overcome?

GK: Yes. That was a retrospective of low-budget disreputable pictures from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. I was delighted that we were able to strike new 35mm prints of many titles no longer in distribution, instead of going through the costly and slow process of scanning original materials in order to create digital elements. If a negative is in good shape, a lab can turn around a positive in a few days. Film to film is pretty easy – after all, it's a process that has existed for a century. For Rotterdam, we had 12 pristine film prints made for us in less than two months, with the help of the Brazilian Cinematheque. Film to digital, however, can be a nightmare in terms of working to adjust grain, colour, sharpness



The joy of celluloid: Louis Lumière savours a strip

and many other factors. It can take half a year to make your master look presentable.

But when coming onboard to help organise a festival of film preservation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this past autumn, I found myself taken aback each time one of the world's top-tier archives would only offer to lend a DCP of their new restorations instead of entrusting preservation prints on film (which are the copies made to sit in a vault, unscathed for posterity). And remember the borrower here is MoMA, who were among the first to set the bar for responsible archival practice in film culture! If museums refuse to lend their sister organisations original materials, events celebrating preservation are rendered meaningless. In some cases, the digital elements were so costly to make that the archives no longer had any budget to produce a print. It's a sad state of affairs.

In Bologna at this year's Il Cinema Ritrovato – still the premiere event in the world devoted to film preservation – the brilliant German scholar Heide Schlüpmann argued passionately that the only way for a film's content to be understood is through its materiality. That's not to say a film can't be understood when it's been converted to a DCP, but that we're understanding it differently than if we were seeing a film print.

NY: The comparison I make is with painting. Even if you could make a digital reproduction of *The Flaying of Marsyas*, say, exact in every detail – the tiniest of pixels, and so on – you couldn't just put it up in a gallery and say to the audience, "But it's just as good as the real thing!" There would be outrage. Is film somehow an inferior artform? If I'm paying money to see *Scarlet Street* at the Austrian Film Museum, I'd be asking for that money back if they had the temerity to show a DCP.

I've seen *The Master* on 70mm at Venice and just yesterday from the UK release DCP at the Tyneside in Newcastle. The latter looked OK, I suppose, but it's ultimately like watching a very big, very fancy telly. And when people have very big, very fancy tellies on their walls, showing ultra-crisp Blu-ray, surely after a while they're not going to want to bother trekking out in the sleet.

As home 'cinema' technology improves, I'm hoping 35mm re-emerges as a precious bit of authenticity – and I'm encouraged by how so many screenings are promoted on the internet, especially Twitter, with specific reference to the format. I've just done a Twitter search for '35mm', and as always it cheered me up no end. The Prince Charles Cinema in London just tweeted: "Only 9 tickets left to *The Dark Knight* trilogy 35mm marathon – Sat 17th." Anthology Film Archives in New York: "Fernando Arrabal (cofounder of the Panic Movement & member of Bréton's surrealist ratpack) presents *Viva la muerte* in 35mm at 7:30 tonight!" And from The Quietist: "Sometimes dead is better... @CigaretteBurns_ present a 35mm screening of *Pet Sematary* @riocinema in Dalston this Friday." I picked those at random, truly, from the top of the search results. But perhaps there's a message. Celluloid's dead – and sometimes dead is better. ☹

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

One of our D'Ascoynes is missing

Mark Duguid's article 'The Dark Side of Ealing' (S&S, November 2012) was all the more appreciated for highlighting a very different side of a studio today far more noted only for its comedies. Duguid was absolutely correct to include *Kind Hearts and Coronets* in his listing, since this remains entirely without parallel as comedy noir.

His text is certainly accurate when it notes that "Dennis Price's Louis coolly murders his way through the best part of eight Alec Guinnesses." But the caption to the associated photos that refers to "the eight D'Ascoynes played by Alec Guinness" misses the fact that Guinness actually played nine family members. A keen eye will recognise him also as the seventh Duke of Chalfont, comfortably dozing away between wife and daughter as the elder Mazzini (played by Dennis Price in his own double role) sings *Don Giovanni*.

Ray Lahey, Toronto

Good and bad 'Beasts'

I don't think I'd have bothered with this email had I not heard the news that the LFF gave a prestigious award to *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. Apparently this film has been bewitching critics and festivals all over the world, but it is as good an example as any of the misguided gushing and media buzz that can attach itself to any old rubbish. Thank you Nick Pinkerton, not just for a smirkingly spot-on trashing in his review (Films of the Month, S&S, November 2012), but now it seems also a lone – and from where I'm standing vital – counterpoint to the plaudits for this twee and trite romanticising of life in abject poverty. The performances, the cloying pretension of the vacuous Malick-style narration, that music – I would expect better from student filmmakers.

Adam Powell, London

Having heard Benh Zeitlin and Quvenzhané Wallis discuss *Beasts of the Southern Wild* on stage just before reading Nick Pinkerton's excoriation of the film, I can't help feeling that Pinkerton was justifying a negative emotional reaction by ridiculing the origins of the film. It hardly offers an "opt-out lifestyle fantasy" for a few wealthy Jewish New York filmmaking kids. Nobody would consider the disenfranchised commune's territory "a pleasing getaway", and Hushpuppy's "condolence-card homilies" stemmed directly from the then six-year-old actor's choice of language. The film's genesis from a comedic stage play to a dark child's-eye fable occurred *in loco* with non-professionals living in its amalgamised landscape. If Zeitlin is being disingenuous, his avowed intention to continue filmmaking in Louisiana seems perverse. Finally, the comparison to Tyler Perry feels offensive when the film is clearly defined by poverty and circumstance, not race.

Christopher Fowler, London

LETTER OF THE MONTH NOT QUITE SO OVERLOOKED



The publicity surrounding the BFI's 2012 release of the US cut of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* ('Things Overlooked', S&S, November 2012) has been somewhat misleading. The suggestion that the film has "never before been released in the UK" (to quote the website blurb) does not take into consideration the fact that two 1980s ITV screenings, a one-off early-2000s appearance on Film4 and very recent (multiple) airings on the satellite channel TCM have all showcased the longer variant. Add to this the fact that this version has for several years been available in a very attractive, multiregion US Blu-ray transfer, and it is clear that the extended version of 'The Shining' is by no means unfamiliar to British audiences.

Interestingly, in 2011 the Dryden Theatre in New York announced that it planned to screen an even longer version of the film, complete with the missing, infamous 'hospital coda'. Unfortunately, this turned out to be wishful thinking and the standard long version was screened instead.

Of course, in the interests of balance, it is worth pointing out that the earliest comprehensive coverage of the cuts to the UK edition appeared in 1980 in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (vol. 47, no. 562) – a concise breakdown of Kubrick's alterations that for several years became the go-to guide for British admirers of the film.

Dr Neil Jackson, University of Lincoln

The arthouse diet

While David Locke asks legitimate questions about critics' influence in 'specialised' films' distribution/commercial success ('The Last Tabu', *The Industry*, S&S, December 2012), I wonder about the role exhibitors themselves might play in the matter. As someone who might be what Locke calls "the more adventurous filmgoer", I looked forward to seeing *Tabu*, though as someone who is also at a geographical remove from the hub of UK film culture, I've resigned myself to a longer wait than most to see such works. My local independent cinema didn't screen *Tabu* until the second half of October – over a month after its initial release.

Said cinema is not part of the Picturehouse chain, but it does pay for City Screen's 'programming expertise'. What makes this so problematic is that – as S&S has noted in years past (eg Editorial, July 2008) – City Screen's chief responsibility to the cinemas who pay for its services is to select films for sites based ultimately on their profitability. Where smaller films like *Tabu* are concerned, programming becomes a self-fulfilling policy: it's OK that three or so weekday matinee screenings won't sell out (apparently "the more adventurous filmgoer" is retired or does not work during

such hours), because a) nobody expected them to, and b) they'll still contribute to the cinema's quota of 'specialised' film, which it has to meet as part of the Digital Screen Network.

Either way, low ticket sales justify the limited exhibition. 'Audience demand', however, is a devil's trick (the same means by which independent cinemas can happily screen the likes of *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Skyfall* for weeks on end), and the long-term worry is that distributors won't even touch films that are deemed to be similar to *Tabu*.

Clearly, this profit game – which in times of austerity cultural institutions prefer to call 'self-sustainment' – goes beyond individual exhibitors, and if we're to challenge it, systemic changes need to happen.

Michael Pattison, Gateshead

Additions and corrections

December p.86 *Alex Cross*, Cert 15, 101m 19s, 9,118 ft +8 frames; p.80 *The Hunt*, aspect ratio is 2.35:1; p.82 *The Master*, Cert 15, 143m 39s, 12,928 ft +8 frames; p.98 *Not Dead Yet*, Cert 15, 86m 45s, 7,807 ft +8 frames; p.99 *The Pool*, Cert 12A, 94m 12s, 8,478 ft +11 frames; p.101 *Ray Harryhausen Special Effects Titan*, France/United Kingdom/USA, Cert PG, 97m 12s, 8,748 ft +0 frames; p.84 *Silver Linings Playbook*, Cert 15, 121m 59s, 10,978 ft +8 frames; p.107 *Yossi*, not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate 15, 80m 35s; p.108 *You Are God*, aspect ratio is 2.35:1.
November p.90 *Call Me Kuchu*, Cert 12A, 87m 8s, 7,842 ft +0 frames.
September p.86 *Berberian Sound Studio*, nationality is United Kingdom/Germany; p.92 *Tabu*, Henrique Espírito Santo plays Gian Luca Ventura.



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"An intoxicating experience" David Jenkins, TIME OUT

A film by Bruno Dumont

HORS SATAN

By the channel, along the Cote'd Opale, near a hamlet with river and marshland lives a strange guy who struggles along, poaches, prays and builds fires. A local girl takes care of him and feeds him...

"Probably **his greatest film**, it's a **brilliant** distillation of his customary themes and preoccupations. It shows **Dumont is world-class**, right now at the top of his game." Kieron Corless, SIGHT & SOUND

"The film is **utterly mesmerizing**" Mar Diestro-Dópido, SIGHT & SOUND

"A **coherent and beautiful parable** of a kind you could imagine Pasolini making" Nick James, SIGHT & SOUND

"**Fantastic**" Gérard Lefort, LIBERATION

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'It's a gem: gentle, eccentric, possessed of a distinctive sort of innocence – and also charming and funny.'

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian



'A delirious celebration of story and the cinematic imagination...in its delicate, even rather shy way, it's the most joyously odd and surprising film of the year.'

Jonathan Romney, Independent on Sunday



'This sublime Portuguese fantasia... a melancholic monochrome masterpiece... a rhapsodic pageant of death, desire, dashed romance... and crocodiles.'

David Jenkins, Little White Lies



Tabu

Miguel Gomes

This critically acclaimed follow-up to *My Beloved Month of August* is a diptych starting off in present day Lisbon where Teresa Madruga gives a luminous performance as a woman concerned about her neighbour Aurora's eccentricities, which then jumps back to Aurora's past in colonial Africa, where she had a delirious love-affair. This second part is made as a quasi-silent film, with no dialogue, just music and voice-over that uses and slyly comments on all the techniques of cinema. A truly virtuoso film with a soundtrack that ranges from Lisztian piano accompaniment to cover versions of Phil Spector, *Tabu* is just a delight. Not to mention the sad and melancholy crocodile...

Available 14 January on DVD, Blu-ray and download

● The DVD and Blu-ray include two shorts by Miguel Gomes: *A Christmas Inventory* and *31 Means Trouble*.

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Reviews



100 **The Man with the Iron Fists**

RZA's debut feels like the product of someone who has been drawing comics since he was ten, and who at the age of 42 incorporated every character and act of unimaginable violence that he'd ever dreamed up or ripped off into a 96-minute package



82 Films of the month



90 Films



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Figure in a landscape: David Dewaele as the taciturn loner in Bruno Dumont's 'Hors Satan'

Hors Satan

France/The Netherlands 2011

Director: Bruno Dumont

See feature
on page 32

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

**Spoiler alert: this review
gives away a plot twist**

Bruno Dumont is at it again, this time with faster cutting, more mannerist compositions and characters so gnostic they don't even have names. *Hors Satan* is a kind of secular parable about the divine – and the satanic – in man. Its protagonist is a taciturn loner who communes with the landscapes, seascapes and sunrises of the Pas de Calais and sleeps rough near a hamlet. He executes rough justice on two wrongdoers, and has evidently acquired a local reputation as a healer. His phallus (not shown this time; Dumont has moved on from the brutal physical frankness of his early features) rescues one girl from what may be a case of demonic possession and later gives another

woman, a backpacker passing through the region, a life-changing experience of casual sex. If this guy is in some sense holy, then the hamlet also harbours his opposite, a fat, shifty-looking dog-owner who kills and rapes people in the woods. It all ends well: the bad guy is arrested, a dead girl comes back to life, and our antihero makes off with the bad guy's dog. Absurd, of course, but also oddly impressive.

Dumont's filmmaking ultimately rests on an anomaly. Most of his six features have been set in northern or north-western France, the region he knows best and loves most, and its landscapes are observed and represented so intensely that they become 'characters' in the films. But this very local specificity is offset by Dumont's penchant for abstraction – some would say, wilful obscurity – in matters of characterisation and plotting. This anomaly is more of an issue in *Hors Satan* than it has been in previous films because the characters here are blander.

The nameless protagonist (David Dewaele, a less expressive echo of Fassbinder's actor Gottfried John) is so close to the landscape

that he lives in it, needing nothing more than a nightly log fire to survive in the open. He rarely speaks, but his presence is imposing and his stare, alternately wondering and accusatory, is penetrating. His nearest analogue in European cinema would be Terence Stamp's supernatural visitor in Pasolini's *Theorem*, but Dumont has no time for Pasolini's political/



Above: Dewaele with Juliette Bacquet

Whether you think Dumont is inspired, deluded or fraudulent, there's no denying that his project has a certain berserk integrity

Lematre, all pallor and black clothes) who is being abused by her stepfather. They start out seeing each other as surrogate father and surrogate daughter; she turns to him for protection and with her connivance he shoots the stepfather dead. As the film goes on, the girl's feelings for the guy become overtly sexual, and she asks him to take her virginity – a request he firmly rejects. It's on the night when she finds him asleep by the embers of his campfire that she presses on into the woods, where she will be raped and killed. In short, the main characters are caught somewhere between their symbolic functions and a more or less credible reality. Dumont never quite succeeds in bridging the gap between pantheist fantasy and mundane village life.

He tries to sidestep the problem by restricting his CinemaScope framing to close-ups and fairly extreme long-shots, building a take-no-prisoners visual rhetoric which is designed to forestall scepticism. His only real aesthetic innovation is to combine wide-angle shots of his characters with close-up sound: we often see distant figures trudging across the landscapes while hearing their rasping breaths loud and clear. The visual rhetoric stands or falls on its own impact; there is no music of any kind, and Dumont prides himself on dispensing with the services of a sound editor, using only the original, direct sound. Mostly the images are 'monumental', as if to assert that no other way of seeing these characters and situations is possible, but occasionally they slip into unwitting self-parody: a widescreen shot in which the guy's rifle suddenly enters from off-screen looks like an idiotic pastiche of Sergio Leone, as does a later shot in which the conservation-area guard steps into frame, turning a long-shot into a close-up. The obvious point of reference for the overall approach is again Pasolini, particularly his 'ethnographic' versions of Christian and pagan myths. But Pasolini would have had no time for Dumont's mysticism, and he always kept his fetishisation of strong, silent alpha males under better control.

Avowedly atheist, Dumont acknowledges Emile Zola and the Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos as seminal influences. (He should obviously start reading D.H. Lawrence, whose pantheism and tendency towards phallic worship would be right up his street.) The fact that this is the third of his features to cite Christian mythology in its title – his 1997 debut was called *The Life of Jesus* and 2009's *Hadewijch* was named after a 13th-century religious mystic – testifies to his abiding fascination with the profession of faith and the human impulse to seek the spiritual. What Dumont himself is seeking, though, is a secular spirituality, closer to Taoist or Nietzschean philosophy. The protagonist of *Hors Satan* kills two 'bad' guys – the girl's stepfather, the guard – with impunity, but suffers the mental agonies of the damned when he accidentally shoots a deer and has to batter its brains out with a

social/class questions. The guy here is simply an embodiment of the spirit of the landscape, beyond good and evil, just doing what a human cipher's gotta do: punishing the wicked, exorcising the odd demon, mechanically giving a stranger the ultimate sex-death thrill, bringing an innocent victim back from the dead.

The trouble is that Dumont can't bring himself to eliminate the social and psychological dimensions altogether. The village murders bring prosaic visits from the local gendarmerie, and a man hired to patrol the nearby conservation area puts in a few desultory appearances. Dumont feels the need to show us how his protagonist eats (he is evidently so revered locally that he has only to knock on some doors for unseen residents to proffer ready-to-go sandwiches or goodie bags of food), although oddly not how he defecates, keeps clean and shaves. The omissions provoke irreverent thoughts: surely this guy reeks? How can the others bear to come near him?

Worse, the central non-romance comes with heavy psychological signposts. The protagonist is adored by a goth teenager (Alexandra

rock to end its suffering. His survivalist code is rooted in his worship of nature (he kneels as if in prayer at the spectacle of the sunrise), and it's the immanent power of nature which he trusts to effect the reanimation of the dead girl, giving the film its climax. Many viewers will be too cynical to accept this premise.

And yet, and yet... Whether you think Dumont is inspired, deluded or fraudulent, there's no denying that his project has a certain berserk integrity. It coalesces in the two scenes in which the protagonist has sex. In the first he brings 'sexual healing' to a girl who has lapsed into catatonia, possibly a victim of satanic possession. In the second he services a passing backpacker, causing her to foam at the mouth. In neither does he evince the least sign of orgasmic pleasure himself; he's simply following nature's orders, transforming two women's lives by giving them a quasi-divine experience. Dumont puts his audience in the same position as those women, liberated by their encounters with a symbolic phallus. The sexual politics may be somewhat Neanderthal, but the aesthetic is as rigid and thrusting as any you'll find in contemporary cinema. The film ends with its antihero taking to the road of life with the faithful dog he's inherited from the bad guy, so the door is open for a sequel. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Jean Bréhat
Rachid Bouchareb
Muriel Merlin
Screenplay
Bruno Dumont
Cinematography
Yves Cape
Editors
Bruno Dumont
Basile Belkhir
Sound
Philippe Lecœur
Costumes
Alexandra Charles

@3B Productions
Production Companies
Produced by 3B Productions in co-production with CRRV Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains

In association with Cinéimage 5 With the participation of Canal+, CinéCinéma, Contact Film, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée With the support of Région Nord-Pas de Calais and CNC

Cast

David Dewaele
guy
Alexandra Lematre
girl
Christophe Bon
guard
Juliette Bacquet
kid
Aurore Broutin
backpacker
Sonia Barthelemy
kid's mother

Valerie Mestdagh
mother
Dominique Caffier
man with a dog

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

In a village near protected natural habitats on the northern coast of France a guy lives rough, fed by benefactors. His closest friend is an unhappy teenager who is abused by her stepfather; they take long walks together, enjoying and perhaps even worshipping the environment, but he refuses all her requests for sex. One day, after she has suffered more than she can bear, the guy shoots and kills the stepfather. The girl refuses overtures from a man who guards the preservation area. A distraught mother in the village asks the guy for help in treating her daughter, who has lapsed into catatonia and may be possessed; the guy eventually restores the girl to life and sanity by raping her. The girl is sexually harassed more insistently by the guard; the guy beats him to death in the woods. The local police investigate the crime and are rumoured to be close to making an arrest. The guy is approached by a woman backpacker and accepts her offer of sex; the act is so convulsive that the woman foams at the mouth, but a dip in the marshes revives her. One night the girl is raped and murdered in the woods. The guy takes her corpse from the house and lays it beside a marsh. The police arrest a village dog-owner for the murders. The girl returns to life and hurries back to her mother, but the guy has already left the village and moved on with the murderer's Alsatian.

The Impossible

Spain 2012

Director: Juan Antonio Bayona

Certificate 12A 113m 32s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist

On the morning of 26 December 2004, a Spanish family comprising María Belón, Enrique Álvarez and their three sons (all under 12) were frolicking by the swimming pool in their hotel resort by the beach in Thailand. The horror of what ensued is widely known: possibly the most destructive tsunami in human history crashed into the Asian coast, with gigantic waves travelling at jet speed releasing energy equivalent to 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs. The final death toll was close to 300,000; millions more people were left homeless and entire communities wiped out. Against all the odds, María, Enrique and their three sons survived the catastrophe.

After she had spent four months recovering from life-threatening injuries, María's moving testimony – which was all over the Spanish media – became the stuff of fairytales. In turn it has become the stuff of cinema. Hearing about it on the radio, producer Belén Atienza immediately knew that there was a story to be told and contacted her regular collaborators, director Juan Antonio Bayona and screenwriter Sergio G. Sánchez. María's family's words and experiences constitute the core narrative of Bayona, Sánchez and Atienza's follow-up to their hugely successful *The Orphanage* (2007). The film is unsurprisingly entitled *The Impossible*.

Bayona has already found himself regarded as something of a wunderkind thanks to his feature debut, *The Orphanage*. Essentially a novel spin on the ghost story with a twist, it met with critical and commercial success and earned the thirtysomething filmmaker comparisons with his hero, Steven Spielberg, as well as putting Spanish horror, traditionally the country's most exportable genre, firmly back on the international map. *The Impossible* is, despite initial appearances, not too dissimilar to *The Orphanage*. Both films are strongly focused on the family unit, and in both it's one character's search for other family members that drives the narrative forward. The horror

in each, albeit originated very differently, is both uncontrollable and uncannily real.

There have been other films about the tsunami and its consequences, notably the moving, low-key Thai film *Wonderful Town* (2007), directed by Aditya Assarat, and Clint Eastwood's more epically inclined *Hereafter* (2010). Bayona's feature is somehow a mixture of both these approaches, though admittedly, like the Eastwood, it takes a very western perspective. As in *Hereafter*, the wave's devastating hit is the crucial, jaw-dropping spectacle in the opening minutes of *The Impossible*, rendered with almost alarming realism. But where Eastwood reoriented the action back to the west and used the cataclysmic wave as the trigger for a brooding, portentous probing of faith and the afterlife, Bayona's narrative is secular, rooted in the real and bound to the affected location: the only way is forward, inch by painful inch, and the characters' salvation is purely down to human attributes of courage and determination.

Bayona has declared that he didn't want *The Impossible* to be entertainment but rather an experience, and perhaps for this reason his film proves difficult to categorise. Although it clearly slots into the disaster genre, the central theme of survival is developed within the parameters of a family melodrama, as was the case with *The Orphanage*. Realism is the constant goal, which is why CGI (unlike in the opening of *Hereafter*) is deployed sparingly in recreating the tsunami and its impact; Bayona's desire was to make the film 'the old way'. This ambitious insistence on a rigorous authenticity required 35,000 gallons of water and six Spanish studios to reproduce the effect of the torrential stream.

Almost two years in the making, *The Impossible* was, however, shot mainly on location where the events took place in Thailand, including the actual Orchid resort where the family stayed, and the same hospital where the mother was looked after.

The viewer is completely submerged in their desperation, fear and pain, to the point where the film is almost unwatchable at times



Above: María (Watts) and son Lucas (Holland) battle for survival

In addition, the majority of extras were local families equally affected by the catastrophe, as well as doctors and nurses who had taken care of injured people. The cinematography by Oscar Faura (also from *The Orphanage*) makes the most of Eugenio Caballero's richly detailed production design to evoke a powerful sense of place and recreate faithfully the original circumstances. For, regardless of this family's happy ending, *The Impossible* couldn't by any means be described as a feelgood film. If anything, the painstaking realism is purposely unforgiving.

The wave's collision is initially filmed from the protagonists' point of view. After a couple of timely, well-judged black screens, María (Naomi Watts) and her 12-year-old son Lucas (Tom Holland) surface in the full force of the stream, trying to catch up with each other and fighting for survival, heads barely out of the water as they are swept away, battered and hit by debris, trees and dead bodies on the way. Such a close-up, immersive style places huge demands on Bayona's actors. Watts and Holland are both outstanding, so much so that the viewer is completely submerged in their desperation, fear and pain, to the point where the film is almost unwatchable at times. The transformation of film debutant Holland from selfish kid to responsible carer is reined-in and carefully calibrated and, incidentally, redolent of Christian Bale's similar arc in Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* (1987).

Halfway through the film there is a drastic change of perspective, switching to the other half of the family, as Ewan McGregor's Henry and their two younger kids – tossed in the opposite direction by the wave – search for María and Lucas. The pace slows and the genre shifts to family melodrama – which, although emotionally charged, just about manages to stave off gratuitous sentimentality for the most part by granting the viewer few concessions; there's no escape from the harshness and starkly unglamorous depiction of massacre in the scenes that take place in the hospital. It is within these more personal parameters that moments such as McGregor's breakdown while talking on the phone with his father-in-law – a scene that could easily have been a disaster – acquire particular resonance. Similarly a cameo by Geraldine Chaplin, though barely a few minutes long, manages to conjure truly Spielbergian magic amid the chaos.

Yet towards the end, Bayona and Sánchez don't shy away from pressing emotional buttons – way too hard at times – particularly in its use of the music score, pushing the film dangerously close to the overblown self-importance of Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006). Composer Fernando Velázquez's piano and strings (somewhere between Spielberg and the most melodramatic moments of recent Almodóvar) is in places so loud and obnoxious that it prompts the unavoidable question: how justifiable is it to make a spectacle from the suffering of others?

As films such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *United 93* (2006) and *Trouble the Water* (2007) demonstrate, in attempting to depict catastrophic circumstances, whether natural or man-made, it's how you do it that matters – and Bayona is alert to this fact. As soon as mother and son arrive at the hospital, Lucas briefly stops to watch what's just happened



Before the storm: Samuel Joslin, Oaklee Pendergast, Tom Holland, Ewan McGregor and Naomi Watts in 'The Impossible'

to them replayed on a TV screen. Even at that early stage, their experience has become a spectacle by virtue of sheer overexposure: the effect of the international coverage that rippled around the world, with images lifted from all kinds of media, numbed the tsunami's effects and rendered those killed or afflicted by it an anonymous mass.

In a not-dissimilar fashion to the Google Maps tool, Bayona and his team zoom in from the spectacular monumentality of those early images to personal experience, using cinema, as Maria the survivor has declared, "as an excuse to tell the story of all those people who remained in the sea". The intense focus on this family's outcome is in itself a constant reminder of those who didn't make it, the calamity of hundreds of thousands of deaths. In *The Impossible*, the characters rise above the catastrophe, not because they are defined by it, but because they are inexorably moving away from it. Which is probably why the title only comes up right at the end, since, in Bayona's words, "The really impossible is what came next: coming back home to try to lead a normal life." 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Belén Atienza
Alvaro Augustin
Enrique López-
Lavigne
Ghislain Barrois
Written by
Sergio G. Sánchez
Storyline
María Belón
Director of
Photography
Oscar Faura
Film Editors
Elena Ruiz
Bernat Vilaplana

Production Designer
Eugenio Caballero
Music Composed
& Conducted By
Fernando Velázquez
Sound Designer
Oriol Tarragó
Costume Designers
Sparka Lee Hall
Anna Bingemann
María Reyes
Visual Effects by
El Ranchito
Fassman
Stunt Co-ordinator
Guimar Alonso

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S.A.U. and Apaches
Entertainment, S.L.
Production
Companies
Summit
Entertainment
and Mediaset
España present
An Apaches
Entertainment,
Telecinco Cinema
production
in association with
La Trini, Canal Plus,

ICAA, IVAC and
Generalitat Valenciana
Executive Producers
Sandra Hermida
Javier Ugarte

Cast
Naomi Watts
Maria
Ewan McGregor
Henry
Tom Holland
Lucas
Samuel Joslin
Thomas

Oaklee Pendergast
Simon
Marta Etura
Simone
Sönke Möhring
Karl
Geraldine Chaplin
old woman
Ploy Jindachot
caregiver
Jomjai Sae-Limh
'Maew'
Red Cross nurse
Johan Sundberg
Daniel

Dolby
DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
E1 Films

10,218 ft +0 frames

Spanish theatrical title
Lo imposible

Thailand, December 2004. A British family – mother Maria, father Henry and their sons Lucas, Thomas and Simon – fly from Japan where they live to Thailand to spend their Christmas holidays in a beach resort. On the morning of 26 December, as they are playing and sunbathing by the pool, they are caught in the tsunami. Maria and Lucas are propelled in one direction and catch up with each other in the midst of the torrent of water. They also rescue a toddler, Daniel. Maria is severely injured and, fearful of another wave, the three of them climb up a tree. Soon afterwards they are rescued by

locals and taken to the hospital. Henry, Thomas and Simon have also survived. Henry sends the two boys with a truckload of other tourists to a nearby mountain for safety, and stays behind to search for Maria and Lucas. Maria undergoes chest surgery and requires a leg operation too. Henry starts searching all the hospitals until he eventually finds Lucas; Thomas and Simon jump out of the lorry, which happens to be passing the hospital, and find them. Maria's operation is successful; the family's insurance company provides a private jet to take them to Singapore for specialised hospital treatment.



All at sea: Suraj Sharma as Pi, shipwrecked with 'Richard Parker' in Ang Lee's 'Life of Pi'

Life of Pi

US/Taiwan/Australia/

United Kingdom/Canada 2012

Director: Ang Lee, Certificate PG 127m 2s

See feature
on page 26

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If this is, as many would have it, the *fin de cinéma*, then the dying of the light is playing a curious trick on the eyes: the silent cinema – doesn't it seem? – has never been nearer. This extends not only to such obvious content-based examples as 2011's *The Artist* and *Hugo*, but to a bevy of films that, in their frame of visual reference and the superfluity of their dialogue, hearken back to a world that supposedly ended in 1927. D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* was the obvious precedent for the Wachowski siblings and Tom Tykwer in their *Cloud Atlas*, while Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* and, on a far more modest scale, Miguel Gomes's *Tabu* draw more or less overtly on the legacy of Murnau. Christopher Nolan's strongest suit, his spectacular orchestration of catastrophe as it trickles through every stratum of a city's life, owes a great deal to the Fritz Lang of UFA. (The subterranean Paul W.S. Anderson, however, is the worthier inheritor of Lang's master-builder mantle.) *The Life of Pi* does not,

at first, seem a promising candidate to add to this list. Its provenance is literary, based on the Canadian author Yann Martel's 2001 novel of the same name. I have, though, never read Martel's book: based on the it-will-change-your-life tenor of recommendations by the converted, I assumed it to be 'wisdom literature' residing somewhere in the neighbourhood of Kahlil Gibran and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Nothing in Ang Lee's film dispels that impression.

The job of filming Martel's book passed through many hands over the last decade before finally landing in Lee's. Lee's screenwriter David Magee 'solved' the problem of adapting the unadaptable with a great deal of voiceover, which covers the ruminations on God turned up by Pi's rummaging through eclectic faiths. The spiritual education of young Pi Patel (who is played in turn here by Gautam Belur, Ayush Tandon and, finally, Suraj Sharma) is recounted by the elder Pi (Irrfan Khan) to interlocutor Martel (Rafe Spall), a device that bookends the film. Philosophical dialogues (and a highly banal first love) are relieved by picturesque backdrops, scenic use being made of Montreal and Pondicherry, the Riviera of the subcontinent.

Taken all together, this material amounts to something like those dippy bumper stickers that spell out 'Co-Exist' in the symbols of

multiple faiths. But – thank God! – movies are more than delivery systems for ideas, and *Life of Pi* has more to offer than this exotic *Bildungsroman*. This is evident when Pi, quite early in unspooling his autobiography, explains that his name is a diminutive of 'Piscine Molitor', taken from a grand art-deco pool in Paris's 16th arrondissement which his champion-swimmer uncle used to frequent. Here is where the 3D glasses that have been pinching your temples start to come in handy, as Lee provides underwater views from beneath Uncle as he slices through the crystal-clear water, water so transparent that he might very well be soaring through the air.

This is a premonition of the startling imagery that is loosed – along with the Patel family's menagerie – when they set sail for a new life in North America and their ark founders in a storm, leaving the teenaged Pi adrift with a wounded zebra, an orangutan, a sardonic hyena and a full-grown Bengal tiger. Due to a clerical error at the zoo, the tiger had been registered under the name of its captor: 'Richard Parker'. Grafting a proper name on to an animal like this seems a bit of a joke at first, reminiscent of Tom Hanks's 'Wilson' volleyball in Robert Zemeckis's *Cast Away* (2000), but the dapper formality of that 'Richard Parker' becomes surprisingly apt with time, as to Pi's eyes – and



Pi gains a front-row seat on the miracles of creation, bearing witness to an out-to-sea world full of astonishing and ethereal visions



ours – the creature evolves an empathetic, nearly human personality. We are a long way from *Jumanji* here, and Richard Parker is a piece of CG sleight with extraordinary, expressive presence, seen seasick, soaked to the fur, starving until the skin hangs off his bony, rolling haunches. The ghostly weightlessness of computer-generated characters has undermined many a film that has placed heavy dramatic burden on them, but at no point in *Life of Pi* does one lose the sense that there is, indeed, a whopping big great cat weighing down one end of Pi's dinghy – thanks in no small part to human effect, namely newcomer Sharma's eloquent, open reaction shots.

That sense of Richard Parker's real weight is crucial to what *Life of Pi* does right. Pi's tentative truce with the tiger is almost certainly a metaphor for something or other – all well and good in its own right – but what makes the film's middle section such riveting viewing has very little to do with spiritual intangibles and everything instead to do with the care and detail with which Lee involves us in the practical problem of surviving at sea in the company of a Bengal tiger: how one keeps it fed; how one keeps it at a safe distance; how one (hesitantly) helps it back into a boat when it's at risk of drowning; how one establishes dominance over it at close quarters. And as improbable as the premise is – one of those news-of-the-weird stories of symbiotic interspecies relationships that are much circulated on the internet – the execution gives it a surprising veracity.

Without the sturdy bedrock of realistic detail depicting the truce between Pi and Richard Parker, the fantastic edifice of imagery that Lee builds atop would certainly falter. For, in visualising Pi's castaway exile – 227 days in open water, comprising a full hour of screen time – Lee shows his hero's imperilled position as a mixed blessing. By tottering on the ledge of his mortality, Pi gains a front-row seat on the miracles of creation, bearing witness to an out-to-sea world full of astonishing and ethereal visions which are hidden from most people, visions with a hint of hallucinatory awe to them, as though Pi's perceptions had been sharpened and widened by sun and starvation. Water and sky run together, making Pi appear as a sort of cosmic traveller – and drawing a visual connection to the zero-gravity weightlessness of the Piscine Molitor. Pi encounters a breaching whale; an underwater cosmos of illuminated jellyfish; a roiling and roaring storm at sea; a blizzard of flying fish; and a sinister island whose surface ripples with innumerable meerkats. There are even in-film aspect-ratio changes, an innovation as old as the masking effects common to the silents, or the suddenly flung-open wings of Abel Gance's *Napoléon*. All this is, in a word, Awesome.

A few words about the Awesome are in order here. The discerning eye sometimes learns to distrust the Awesome, precisely because it is available to everyone, and therefore cheapened. Even the teenagers reluctantly dragged on an art museum field trip don't need to be instructed on how to enjoy, say, a wall-hogging John Martin or a blockbuster landscape such as Church's *The Heart of the Andes*... and so the discerning eye leaves the crowd to linger instead on a little detail in this particular etching hung in

an obscure corner which is so very well done, all the more attractive because it is the secret property of the happy few who know where to look for it. I don't want to praise the Awesome at the expense of such subtle and private pleasures, but neither should the Awesome be dismissed out of hand because too much beauty is a little gauche – and this was the detectable response of many of the self-professed cinephiles leaving Pi's New York Film Festival opening-night screening.

The problem with *Life of Pi* – and seemingly everyone talking about the film, even those of us who admire it on the whole, agree that there is a problem – is not its embarrassment of beauty, but instead the problem of many an early talkie. When it is communicating in images, *Pi* is frequently profound; when it opens its mouth to speak, only tinny commonplaces are heard. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Gil Netter Ang Lee David Womark	Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and Dune Entertainment III LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)	Rafe Spall writer G��rard Depardieu cook Ayush Tandon Pi Patel aged 11/12 years Gautam Belur Pi Patel aged 5 years Adil Hussain Santosh Patel Ayaan Khan Ravi Patel aged 7 years Mohd. Abbas Khaleeli Ravi Patel aged 13/14 years Vibish Sivakumar Ravi Patel aged 18/19 years
Screenplay David Magee Based upon the novel by Yann Martel	Production Companies Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Haishang Films/Gil Netter production An Ang Lee film Produced in association with Big Screen Productions and Ingenious Film Partners With the participation of the Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit	Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [1.85:1]
Director of Photography Claudio Miranda	Executive Producers Dean Georgaris	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
Film Editor Tim Squyres	Cast Suraj Sharma Pi Patel Irrfan Khan adult Pi Patel Tabu Gita Patel	11,433 ft +0 frames
Production Designer David Gropman		
Music Mychael Danna		
Costume Designer Arjun Bhasin		
Supervising Sound Editors Eugene Gearty Philip Stockton		
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Montreal, the present. Middle-aged Pi sits down with an interviewer, Yann Martel, who has sought Pi out because he can allegedly tell a story that will make one believe in God.

In flashback, Pi recollects his boyhood in Pondicherry, India, where his father was the keeper of the local zoo. Despite his father's staunch materialist rationalism, young Pi soaks up the spiritual influences of the city's Hindu, Christian and Muslim presences. Pi and his family leave India and head to North America, where they plan to sell their animals and begin a new life. But their ship founders in a storm, stranding Pi on a lifeboat with a wounded zebra, an orangutan, a hyena and a Bengal tiger named 'Richard Parker'. Through the natural order of things, Richard Parker is soon the only animal left; Pi, arranging an offboard raft for himself, manages a cautious truce with the beast. When they are forced to share the same vessel following a storm, Pi tames the tiger, and they begin to face the elements together. After being washed ashore on a strange carnivorous island teeming with meerkats, they decide to take their chances again at sea, finally arriving at a Mexican beach where they go their separate ways.

In the present, Pi offers Martel the choice of a far more plausible but less inspirational version of his story. Preferring to believe one instead of the other, Pi says, is the essence of faith.



The accused: Damien Echols, one of the West Memphis Three, whose wrongful imprisonment is examined in Amy Berg's 'West of Memphis'

West of Memphis

US/New Zealand 2012

Director: Amy Berg

Certificate 15 147m 7s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Very much in the campaigning tradition of *The Thin Blue Line*, Amy Berg's *West of Memphis* likewise examines a notorious murder case, exposes the multiple flaws in the evidence and the conviction procedure, and fingers a likely culprit. If it's ultimately less satisfying than Errol Morris's 1988 film, that's partly thanks to the judicial shenanigans that eventually allowed the 'West Memphis Three' to walk free after 18 years in jail. While the convicted man in Morris's film, Randall Adams, was finally declared innocent thanks to the arguments and evidence presented in the film, the three jailed men in *West of Memphis* are released only by means of an anomaly in US law: an 'Alford plea', which allows a defendant to plead guilty while still maintaining innocence. Not only does this let the State of Arkansas off the hook, saving face and precluding any suits for wrongful imprisonment, it also means that the real killer or killers can never be brought to justice.

The case of the WM3 has already been the subject of Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's *Paradise Lost* trilogy broadcast on HBO (the third film won an Oscar nomination), and it doesn't lack for sensational detail. In May 1993 the bodies of three eight-year-old boys were found in a ditch on the outskirts of West

Memphis, Arkansas. They'd been hogtied and their naked bodies were covered in deep lacerations, especially around the genitals. On the basis of minimal evidence, a case was constructed against three teenagers, alleging that the boys were the victims of a satanic cult; the accused youths – Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin and Jessie Misskelley – were found guilty amid scenes of public hysteria. Echols was sentenced to death, Baldwin and Misskelley to life imprisonment. Intercutting footage of the original trial with the gradual unearthing of new evidence and the demolition of the flawed prosecution case, the first half of Berg's film carries all the patient, detailed inexorability of a thoroughgoing forensic investigation.

Berg, as was evident from her debut film *Deliver Us from Evil* (2006), about a paedophile

Catholic priest shielded by the Church and repeatedly shifted from parish to parish, is very much a traditional documentary-maker, relying on existing newsreel footage, straight-to-camera interviews and the steady build-up of information to tell her story. Not for her the personal onscreen intrusions of a Michael Moore or a Morgan Spurlock. But this doesn't imply any sense of detachment or lack of emotional involvement. We're left in no doubt what she and her colleagues think of the rabble-rousing techniques of John Fogelman, the Arkansas prosecuting attorney; of the shakiness of the forensic evidence presented by the assistant medical examiner Dr Frank Peretti, covering his ineptitude with repeated emphasis on emotive words like 'gouging'; of the behaviour of the West Memphis police, browbeating a cobbled-together confession out of the 'borderline retarded' Jessie Misskelley; of the mule-headed stubbornness of original trial judge David Burnett, repeatedly dismissing DNA evidence and the unanimous testimony of a host of expert pathologists as of no account.

Berg's restraint, never haranguing us or resorting to emotive voiceovers, leaves us free to follow the story without feeling manipulated. Indeed, she initially presents the events of the trial totally without comment, as if inviting us to take the verdicts at their face value, before gradually exposing the gaping lacunae in the case. But equally, we're never left with the comforting feeling that what we're watching is a rare miscarriage of justice, an anomalous breakdown in the otherwise



Above: Davis and Echols

sound American legal system. As Damien Echols resignedly comments: "This case is nothing out of the ordinary. This happens all the time." Ironically, it was probably the very sensationalism of the initial prosecution case that, in the end, led to the freeing of the WM3. Had the case not attracted so much nationwide attention to start with, the campaign to free the accused would never have gathered such widespread and persistent support.

The steady accumulation of DNA evidence – none from any of the three accused was found on the boys' bodies, their clothes or the ropes that bound them – carries its own fascination. But perhaps the film's most vivid moment is when we see a breeder of freshwater turtles allowing one of his charges to take a bite out of his forearm. The creature sinks its jaws in with a vicious snap that your average shark might envy. The resultant wound demonstrates convincingly enough that the lacerations on the three boys' bodies – which a pathologist determines were inflicted after death – came not from the knives of the supposed Satanists, but from the turtles living in the creek where the bodies were dumped. This would also explain the genital mutilations, since – as we see when a pig's carcass is dropped into their tank – turtles go for the softest parts first.

The second half of Berg's film (which, at nearly two and a half hours, feels a touch overextended) changes gear, moving from the forensic to the investigatory and building a case against the man the filmmakers consider the true killer: Terry Hobbs, stepfather of one of the murdered boys. It's at this point that misgivings may set in. Hobbs, at least from what we're told, isn't the most loveable of men; it seems he's prone to violence against women and children, and evidently disliked his stepson. But from there to threefold murder is a jump, and the question of why he might have killed the other two boys is never even raised. And where David Harris, the real cop-killer in *The Thin Blue Line*, confesses straight to Errol Morris's camera, Hobbs calmly and consistently asserts his innocence in the face of all provocation. In effect, the filmmakers select their evidence – largely hearsay – and find him guilty. Quite possibly he is, but the process leaves an uneasy feeling.

This apart, though, it's a heroic and inspiring saga. Much of the credit should go to Lorri Davis, a young New Yorker who corresponded with Damien Echols, married him in a jail ceremony in 1999 and tirelessly campaigned to have the original verdict overturned. Her



Above: Pam Hicks, the mother of murdered eight-year-old Stevie Branch

indomitable efforts inspired the director Peter Jackson and his partner Fran Walsh to get involved, and they in their turn brought in Amy Berg, while celebrities including Patti Smith and the Dixie Chicks gave concerts and lent their support. Another of the film's heroic figures is Echols's defence attorney Dennis Riordan, who persisted for years, working largely pro bono and often in the face of seemingly insurmountable setbacks, to establish his client's innocence. And despite the corrupt and underhand tactics of the original prosecution case, the obduracy of the State of Arkansas in maintaining the verdict in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence, and the unsatisfying legal contrivance that eventually led to the release of the WM3, the final shots of the three enjoying their first experience of freedom in 18 years are a heartwarming sight. 

Berg's restraint, never haranguing us or resorting to emotive voiceovers, leaves us free to follow the story without feeling manipulated

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Amy Berg
Fran Walsh
Producers
Damien Echols
Lorri Davis
Written by
Amy Berg
Billy McMillin
Directors of Photography
Maryse Alberti
Ronan Killen
Edited by
Billy McMillin
Production Designer
Linda Sena

Original Music
Nick Cave
Warren Ellis
Production Sound Mixers
Abe Dolinger
Alan Barker
Jeff Deeth
James Machowski
Chris McIntire
Costume Designer
Diaz Jacobs

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Production Companies
A Wingnut Films
production in association with

Disarming Films
An Army
Bergman Film
Executive Producer
Ken Kamins

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

13,240 ft +
8 frames

In May 1993, three eight-year-old boys – Stevie Branch, Michael Moore and Christopher Byers – are found dead in a creek in West Memphis, Arkansas. They've been tied up and their naked bodies are covered in lacerations. Three youths – Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley and Jason Baldwin – are arrested for the boys' murder and tried amid allegations of a satanic cult. Jessie, who is considered 'borderline retarded', signs a confession but the other two protest their innocence. All three are convicted; Damien is sentenced to death, the others to life imprisonment.

Despite widespread demands for a retrial over the next 18 years, the 'West Memphis Three' stay in jail. A young New Yorker, Lorri Davis, corresponds with Damien; in 1999 they marry. In 2005 the director Peter Jackson and his partner Fran Walsh get in touch with Lorri offering to help, and start working with the defence team to unearth new evidence. In September 2008 much new evidence, including DNA testing, is presented to the original trial judge, David Burnett, but he dismisses it. Lorri and Fran contact filmmaker Amy Berg, who starts work on a documentary.

Evidence is unearthed that points to Terry Hobbs, Stevie Branch's stepfather, as the killer. The Arkansas Supreme Court holds a new hearing and overturns Burnett's original ruling. Despite this, the WM3 remain in jail. In August 2011 defence attorney Dennis Riordan persuades the three to make an 'Alford plea', whereby they plead guilty while maintaining their innocence. Thanks to this face-saving device, which allows the State of Arkansas to avoid admitting a judicial error, the three are released from jail.



Above: the campaign to free Echols, Baldwin and Misskelley gathered widespread support

Boxing Day

United Kingdom/USA 2012
Director: Bernard Rose

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Boxing Day is the third in a loose trilogy of Tolstoy adaptations by director Bernard Rose. Beginning with 1999's celebrated *ivansxtc* (based on *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*), Rose has systematically relocated the class dynamics and sweeping melodrama of the Russian novelist to contemporary L.A. *Boxing Day*, like his intermediate Tolstoy film *The Kreutzer Sonata* (2008), also shares an affinity with his 1994 Beethoven biopic *Immortal Beloved*: while it isn't explicitly about music, its emotional and thematic arc is carried entirely by Schubert's Piano Sonata in A Major D959, which is heard half a dozen times starting with the film's dawn opening, and Górecki's Symphony No 3, heard over its dawn ending. The tentative, yearning sonata of loss and exile and the powerful, mourning symphony contrast with each other, and with the film itself: their emotional heft, far from underlining the narrative, comes to represent the gap between *Boxing Day*'s ambitions and its realisation.

The story of a financially and emotionally maxed-out property developer looking to turn a quick buck on Boxing Day by buying up foreclosed properties before the banks reopen for business in the New Year – borrowing money from a church fund administered by a little old lady to do so – should resonate deeply. Likewise the status conflict suggested by the title of Tolstoy's short story 'Master and Man', which is here recast between the developer, Basil (Danny Huston), and his driver Nick (Matthew Jacobs), whom Basil asks to call him 'Sir' on their drive through Colorado. But the lack of subtlety in their conversation is at the core of the film's problems. The improvised dialogue is banal to the point that the satnav voice becomes a welcome interruption. Whereas the car journeys in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) or Ramin Bahrani's *Goodbye Solo* (2008) create layers of meaning about class, nation and identity through movement, *Boxing Day* is static. The grey box of the car grows progressively darker and harder to read as evening overcomes the men's journey: viewers know they should see it as a symbol of America's status obsession, of its journey to nowhere, but the dialogue



Chancing on ice: Danny Huston

and pacing ensure that it never transcends its nature as a convenient device for a two-hander.

Thus the blazing dawn, helicopter and Górecki symphony, when they arrive, seem laughably melodramatic as a response to a malfunctioning satnav. And while the yawning gap between the banality of *Boxing Day*'s subject-matter and flat performances and the vaunting of its musical ambition could be read as deliberate, an evocation of a Jamesonian hollowness of American postmodern culture in comparison to classical European texts, the film seems to believe its musical hype, turning the volume up to 11 on Górecki and showing Nick looking to the snow-covered mountains whence cometh his help.

There is a profound film to be made about the current financial crisis rooted in subprime mortgages and foreclosures, a layered, rich story in which, via powerful images and gestures, hierarchy is cancelled by human kindness and the primacy of the living world reasserts itself over capital, but *Boxing Day* is not that film. ❌

Celeste and Jesse Forever

Director: Lee Toland Krieger
Certificate 15 92m 5s

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

You can almost see the title scratched into the inside of a locker door. Celeste and Jesse, student sweethearts, destined to be together forever because it says so in lettering earnestly scored into the metal. But forever is a long time, and Lee Toland Krieger's spry romantic comedy introduces us to the inseparable pair at a point just after their separation, trend-spotter Celeste (Rashida Jones) having done a little prognostication about her own future and decided that she wants more from a relationship than laidback charmer Jesse (Andy Samberg) can offer.

An opening montage rushes through the highlights of their togetherness, ending with the moment of rupture. But when the film proper begins, we find Celeste and Jesse in the front seats of a car, still buoyed by their time-tested chemistry and sharing a puerile joke about a phallic lip salve. As in the films of the Duplass brothers, close camerawork brings us within chafing distance of a private language of jests and gestures. Romance on screen always used to be an inclusive affair, audience-facing enough to allow each viewer to inscribe their own desires on star-crossed fortunes. In the mumblecore world, we are made gooseberries in an intimate crossfire of reciprocated mannerisms and silly voices.

Next we see Celeste and Jesse at dinner with best friends Beth (Ari Graynor) and Tucker (Eric Christian Olsen), vivisectioning the restaurant menu in cod-Germanic accents, another apparent fixture of their couply comedy routine. It's a hilarious double act, subtly undercut by an awkward sense that Celeste and Jesse's amusement – drawing on a marriage-worth of mutual knowledge and allusion – is greater than that of their friends. The sense of intimacy between the pair is such that we half imagine these scenes are pre-breakup flashbacks, until Beth gets up and walks out on her dining companions, fed up with the pair carrying on as if they aren't about to get a divorce.

Still living in each other's pockets and sparking off each other's company, Celeste and Jesse are indeed unlikely divorcees. Their routine goodbye of "I love you"/"I love you too" may now be platonic, but a lived-in rapport endures which even the machinations of romcom formulae could struggle to replace convincingly. The easygoing affinity between Jones and Samberg, who appeared together in supporting roles in the bromance comedy *I Love You, Man* (2009), convinces as a snapshot of an intertwined couple whose bond was forged in younger days.

Co-written by Jones, best known for her appearances on US TV series *Parks and Recreation* and the American version of *The Office*, and Will McCormack, who plays a secondary role here as Jesse's friend Skillz, the script works hard to wrong-foot our expectations, toying with the apparent inevitability of the couple's reconciliation, then planting a half-time dramatic turn which seems to make that an impossibility. When Jesse tells Celeste that he's about to have an unplanned baby with Veronica (Rebecca Dayan), a beautiful Belgian woman Skillz set him up with after the split, headstrong Celeste's emotional handle on the breakup

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Luc Roeg
Naomi Despres

Screenplay

Bernard Rose
Based on *Master and Man*
by Leo Tolstoy

Cinematography

Bernard Rose

Editing

Bernard Rose

Original Music

Bernard Rose

Sound Recordist

Alexandra Daniels

©British Film
Institute/
Independent Film
Productions
Production
Companies
BFI and Independent

present in association
with LipSync

Productions an

Independent/Giant

Door production

Made with the

support of BFI's

Film Fund

Executive Producers

Michael Robinson

Andrew Orr

Norman Merry

Michael Rose

Lisa Henson

Cast

Danny Huston

Basil

Matthew Jacobs

Nick

Edie Dakota

Nathalie

Lisa Enos

Marianne

Jo Farkas

Rosemary

Julie Marcus

Cynthia

Lyne Renee

Carla

Morgan Walsh

Martha

In Colour

[L85:1]

Distributor

Independent

Distribution

Los Angeles, the present. On *Boxing Day*, property developer Basil Fenton Smith decides to visit a number of properties in the Denver area that are about to be foreclosed. He persuades a church restoration fund that he can double its capital by buying the houses and selling them on. In Denver, he is met by Nick, a driver living alone since leaving his wife and children, who don't want to see him. Nick is hapless with both Basil and the satnav, and after four or five houses, the pair get lost in the mountains at dusk. After a brief stop at a bar, where Basil flirts with the bartender, they try to find the final property, only to get stuck on ice. Basil suggests they switch the engine and heaters on for half of every hour; but when the engine won't start, he panics and tries to hike to help. He falls down a hill, then manages to wade through snow back to the car, finding Nick delirious with cold. Nick asks Basil to give his pay to his wife; Basil embraces Nick, warming him. They are found by a helicopter crew in the morning, Basil dead and Nick alive.

Chakravyuh

India 2012

Director: Prakash Jha

Certificate 15 146m 12s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

The area of India known as the Red Corridor, which includes parts of the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, is home to the Naxalites, a Maoist insurgent movement named after the Naxalbari village in Bengal where the rebellion began in 1967. The Naxalites are in an armed struggle with the Indian government (which has declared them terrorists), their cause the lack of basic amenities and development in the country's marginalised communities.

It's a conflict that has been mined a few times for the screen, Anant Mahadevan's *Red Alert: The War Within* being a recent Bollywood example. *Chakravyuh* (the title, meaning vicious circle, is a reference to an episode in the *Mahabharata* when a prince is fatally trapped in a circular military formation) is director Prakash Jha's take on the subject. Jha is known for making films that look at Indian social and political issues: *Damul* (1985) dealt with bonded labour, *Mrityudand* (1997) female emancipation, *Gangaajal* (2003) police brutality, *Apaharan* (2005) the kidnapping industry, *Raajneeti* (2010) corruption in politics, and *Aarakshan* (2011) the controversial reservation policy in education.

While Jha has managed in the past to marry such issues with Bollywood-style entertainment, he isn't completely successful with *Chakravyuh*. For one thing, the boilerplate of someone being sent into hostile territory and then going native feels familiar, having been used in films as diverse as *Becket* (1964), *Namak Haraam* (1973), *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and *Avatar* (2009). In this case, cop Adil Khan (Arjun Rampal) sends his best friend Kabir (Abhay Deol) into a Naxalite den – at Kabir's insistence – to serve as an informer, and Kabir soon turns sympathetic to the cause. There is a gaping hole in the logic here: although Kabir has had police training in the past,



Split definitive: Andy Samberg, Rashida Jones

falters and she tries to backpedal into Jesse's life.

That Veronica – like Paul (Chris Messina), whom Celeste starts seeing after he tries to pick her up at a yoga class – is drawn rather blandly, all niceness and perfection in contrast to Celeste's quirky, rough-edged individuality, might feel a lazily lopsided way of weighting audience sympathies. But, after six years of marriage, the sense that these dating newcomers seem depthless and unknown, inadequate foils or replacements for soulmates whose sensibilities are so aligned, is appropriate. A subplot with teen pop star Riley (Emma Roberts) is less persuasive: taken on by Celeste's

trend-forecasting agency against the latter's better judgement, her character arc from airheaded celeb to caring/sharing human being is the film's one fatuous overstep.

Elsewhere, the knowing portrait of mores and manners in LA's hipster districts of Silver Lake and West Hollywood is more subtle. Its barbs about yoga-going, alfalfa-chomping creatives aren't likely to draw anyone's blood, and *Celeste and Jesse Forever* is ultimately a cornball romcom in cooler-than-thou clothing. But it's witty, often charming, and it doesn't cheat on the emotional uncertainties of lives at a painful turning point. 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lee Nelson
Jennifer Todd
Suzanne Todd

Written by

Rashida Jones
Will McCormack

Director of

Photography
David Lanzenberg

Edited by

Yana Gorskaya

Production Designer

Ian Phillips

Music
Sunny Levine
Zach Cowie

Costume Designer

Julia Caston

@[TBC]

Production

Companies
Envision Media Arts
presents a Team
Todd production

An Envision Media

Arts production
A film by Lee
Toland Krieger

Executive Producers

Rashida Jones
Will McCormack

Cast

Rashida Jones
Celeste
Andy Samberg

Jesse

Chris Messina
Paul
Ari Graynor

Beth

Eric Christian Olsen
Tucker

Will McCormack

Skillz
Rebecca Dayan
Veronica
Rich Sommer
Max

Matthew Del Negro

Nick
Rafi Gavron
Rupert

Elijah Wood

Scott
Emma Roberts
Riley

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor

Buena Vista
International (UK)

8,287 ft +8 frames

Los Angeles, the present. After six years of marriage, Celeste and Jesse are getting a divorce. Celeste, a professional trend-spotter whose company has just taken on a contract with arrogant teen pop star Riley, feels that she has outgrown her unambitious longtime soulmate. However, the pair remain best friends and still spend time together, joking and sparring. Over dinner one evening, their friends Beth and Tucker express concern that they're acting as if their divorce isn't happening. Jesse's friend Skillz encourages him to start dating again. Celeste asks Jesse for some DIY help and they end up sleeping together – though Celeste regrets it in the morning.

When Celeste returns from a business trip, Jesse tells her that he's having a baby with Veronica, a Belgian woman Skillz set him up with three months previously. Shocked at the news, Celeste begins to go on dates

herself, enduring a string of misbegotten encounters. She spurns the advances of Paul at a yoga class, but later starts seeing him. Jesse tells Celeste he needs to marry Veronica so that she can stay in the country; he asks her to sign her divorce papers. The pair fall out. Celeste goes off the rails and runs into trouble at work when unintended genital symbols are noticed in the poster campaign for Riley. However, Riley tells Celeste that she likes the campaign, which has made her a gay pop sensation. The two bond over relationship difficulties.

Celeste tells Paul that she isn't ready to date again. She's reconciled with Jesse after giving a heartfelt speech at Beth and Tucker's wedding. Later, they sign the divorce papers and Celeste wishes Jesse well for his future with Veronica. She calls Paul to tell him she's ready to see him again.



Brothers with arms: Arjun Rampal

he has a record of being a violent hothead and a layabout, so it's hard to understand why Adil should trust the mission to him; and from Kabir's point of view, friendship notwithstanding, it's foolhardy to volunteer for a task so fraught with danger. Perhaps Jha and writer Anjum Rajabali were banking on Bollywood's long history of homoerotic films in which best friends routinely promise to lay down their lives for each other and often do.

While Jha successfully manages to recreate the Naxalites' conflict, he destroys the atmosphere by shoehorning in unnecessary song-and-dance sequences. It's difficult to take revolutionaries seriously when they carouse loudly with the threat of a police bullet just around the corner. Where Jha does well is in taking a balanced look at the issue from all sides, whether that's Naxalite, government, police or army, and he concludes on the sombre note that all these systems are inherently flawed and corrupt. ❧

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Prakash Jha	Ganesh	Murli Sharma Chetan Pandit
Screenplay Prakash Jha Anjum Rajabali Sagar Pandya	Production Company Prakash Jha Productions	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Director of Photography Sachin K. Krishn	Cast Abhay Deol Kabir Arjun Rampal Adil Khan Om Puri Govind Suryavanshi Esha Gupta Rhea Menon Manoj Bajpayee Rajan Anjali Patil Juhi Kabir Bedi Deep Raj Rana Harsh Mairna	Distributor Eros International
Editor Santosh Mandal		13,158 ft +0 frames
Art Director Jayant Deshmukh		
Music Salim Merchant Sulaiman Merchant Vijay Verma		
Lyricist Turaz		
Sound Rakesh Ranjan		
Stunt Co-ordinator Abbas Ali Moghul		
Choreography		

Madhya Pradesh, India, the present. The chief minister of the state signs a £1.8 billion deal with the UK-based Mahanta group to exploit the mineral-rich Nandighat area. However, the area is occupied by tribal people under the protection of a Maoist army that runs its own private government. Repeated police and army attacks have ended in victories for the Maoists. Upright police superintendent Adil Khan volunteers to take charge of the district and oust the Maoists, much to the consternation of his wife Rhea, herself a police officer. Khan initially convinces the villagers to cooperate with him by saying that he will undo past police wrongs, but they are cowed when the Maoists murder one of their number for collaborating with the police. Khan has recently reunited with his best friend Kabir, who trained with Khan and Rhea before being thrown out of the police academy for insubordination. Kabir offers to infiltrate the Maoist group and Khan reluctantly agrees.

Kabir successfully infiltrates the group and is attracted to female comrade Juhi. He feeds information back to Khan; having helped in the capture of Maoist chief Rajan, Kabir takes over as leader. Juhi is also captured. When she is raped in police custody, Kabir's loyalties change. He leads an attack on the Mahanta premises and abducts the chairman's son, who is eventually released in exchange for Rajan. Khan now brings the full might of the police to bear on the area. In the resulting fracas, Khan shoots Juhi dead but cannot bring himself to shoot Kabir – Rhea does the job for him.

Chasing Ice

USA 2012
Director: Jeff Orlowski



Receding scare line: James Balog

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

"The story is in the ice," contends nature photographer and eco-activist James Balog, the intrepid anchor of Jeff Orlowski's debut documentary feature. Indeed, it's the mesmerising images captured by Balog of the world's embattled glaciers – beautiful, eerie stills and arresting time-lapse footage collated over several years – that supply the film's purest, most forceful narrative. In comparison, the surrounding documentary framework is fairly humdrum, and sometimes struggles to settle on its own 'story': *Chasing Ice* is variously a profile of a driven individual, a chronicle of an audacious mission, and a slender primer on climate change.

With a touch more eccentricity, Balog might resemble one of Werner Herzog's visionary obsessives. Throughout we see him disregarding his own wellbeing in the pursuit of evidence, scaring the wits out of his field team by filming on perilous terrain, and shedding tears of bitter frustration over particularly grievous (and costly) equipment failures. A geomorphology graduate, Balog is likened to a latter-day, tech-savvy Ansel Adams, blending science and art to create striking portraits of fragile ecosystems. Orlowski supplies a snappy potted history of his subject's acclaimed career which comes close to hagiographic backslap, as talking heads line up to champion the undeniably innovative work. Among them is fellow photographer/activist Louie Psihoyos, mastermind of dolphin slaughter exposé *The Cove* (2009), a film that *Chasing Ice* parallels to some degree. In both, sceptics turned converts to a cause make painstaking use of camera technology to record an environmental incident, and each ends with the results being absorbed by dumbfounded lecture audiences.

Over a four-year period, Orlowski – doubling as camera operator – documents Balog's 'Extreme Ice Survey', an ambitious project whereby dozens of time-lapse cameras are installed at remote locations in Iceland, Greenland, Alaska and Montana. Notwithstanding a devastating hardware malfunction that nullifies an entire year's worth of recording, Balog's crew gradually accumulates spectacular and disturbing evidence of the glaciers in rapid retreat. We witness a 'calving event' – a collapsing ice shelf comparable to a third of Manhattan breaking away into the ocean – and learn that the glaciers have retreated more in the past decade

than in the previous hundred years. Part of the problem, comments Balog, is that geology has conditioned people to assume that the transformation of landscapes is always a slow process; in this case, it's visibly the opposite.

While the material gathered is astounding, Orlowski's documentary treatment is inclined to meander. The action is punctuated at several intervals by rapid-fire media clips giving a platform to rankled climate-change sceptics, setting up a crude opposition between Balog and those who would be his adversaries. One scene that's notable for its staged quality has Balog, forced into convalescence by a recurring knee injury, grimacing at yet another dismissive voice on TV. It's a little like the superhero denuded of his powers, watching on impotently as the world goes to hell. Orlowski doesn't really offer an in-depth counterblast, save for a sparing use of charts and graphs to illustrate the speed of the icecaps' diminishing. But perhaps, he's saying, the images should speak for themselves – this is a documentary as visual as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) was verbose and data-heavy. Balog states that his goal is to preserve "the memory of a landscape". On these terms, *Chasing Ice* remembers with stark lucidity. ❧

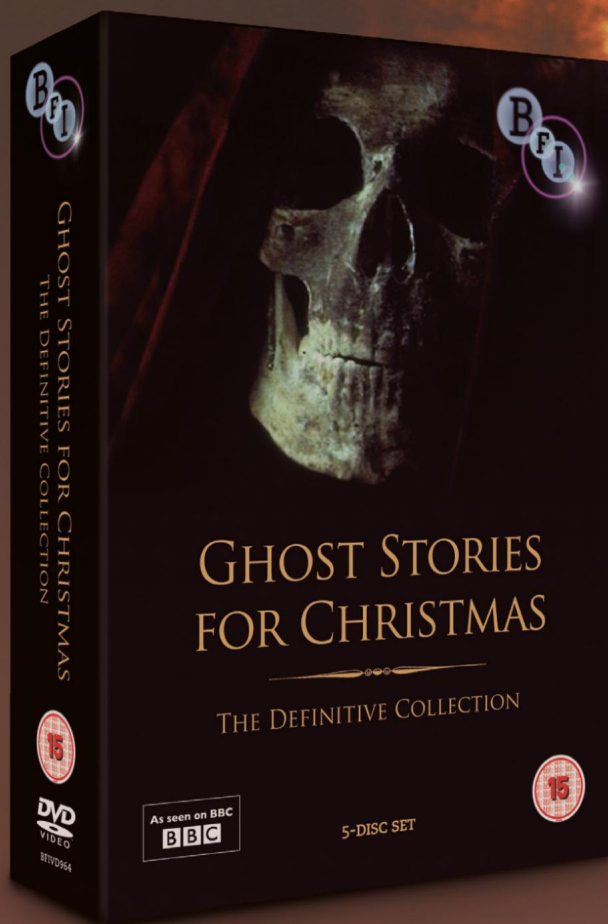
Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jeff Orlowski Paula Dupre / Pesmen Jerry Aronson	Music J. Ralph Production Sound David Levine Dave Ruddick	Diamond Docs Executive Producers David J. Cornfield Linda A. Cornfield
Written by Mark Monroe	Director of Photography Jeff Orlowski	In Colour [1.78:1]
Time-Lapse Direction and Still Photography James Balog	Production Companies Submarine Deluxe presents an Exposure production in association with	Distributor Dogwoof
Edited by		

A documentary record of natural-history photographer James Balog's 'Extreme Ice Survey', a project launched with the aim of providing overwhelming evidence of climate change through the real-time study of retreating glaciers. Balog and his team install multiple time-lapse cameras at locations in Iceland, Greenland, Alaska and Montana, returning periodically to view the results. After four years – despite setbacks including equipment failure and Balog's own health problems – the team unveils sobering footage of the glaciers' rapid deterioration.



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Confession of a Child of the Century

France/Germany/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Sylvie Verheyde

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Sylvie Verheyde's handheld, idiosyncratic adaptation of Alfred de Musset's 19th-century Romantic novel *The Confession of a Child of the Century* pitches together Charlotte Gainsbourg and singer-songwriter Pete Doherty as ill-matched, tormented lovers, something of an intriguing combination on paper if not in reality. Doherty is young libertine Octave who, in the wake of betrayal by his mistress, falls into a vortex of sin only to be reined in (albeit temporarily) by Brigitte, a widower ten years older and centuries more mature than him.

It's easy to see why Doherty has been cast as a dissipated dandy, but he can't muster anything beyond flat delivery of his lines and a general air of boredom. Surprisingly, Gainsbourg's performance is every bit as excruciating as Doherty's banal Romantic philosophising. The attention paid to recreating period and atmosphere provides some compensation, although an overuse of candlelight creates a sepia quality, like an old photograph, that soon loses its glow.

For all the intense focus on the central tempestuous pairing and their mutual lack of trust, the real lack in *Confession* is any sense of passion, intoxication or edge, strangled at birth by a wordy, lifeless script. The one truly sensual scene – Brigitte's bout of jealousy at Octave courting another woman – works well precisely because it plays out like a silent film. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bruno Berthemy

Written by
Sylvie Verheyde
Based upon the novel by Alfred de Musset *La confession d'un enfant du siècle*

Director of Photography
Nicolas Gaurin

Editor
Christel Dewynter

Production Designer
Thomas Grézaud

Original Score
NousDeux the band

Sound
Dimitri Haulet
Raphaël Sohier
Olivier Dô Hùu

Costume Designer
Esther Walz

@Les Films du Veyrier, Integral Film, Warp Films, Rhône Alpes Cinéma, Arte France Cinéma, Ad

Vitam, Herodiade

Production Companies

Bruno Berthemy presents in co-production with Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Arte France Cinéma in association with Wild Bunch, Ad Vitam with the participation of Canal+, Arte France, Ciné+, Région Rhône-Alpes, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Filmförderungsanstalt, Deutscher Filmförderfonds with the support of MEDIA - Program of the European Union an Integral Films, Warp Films co-production A Les Films du Veyrier production A film by Sylvie Verheyde

In co-production with Integral Film, Warp Films, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Arte France Cinéma, Hérodiade, Touscoprod.com With the support of Procirep - Angoa Agicoa, MEDIA - Program of the European Union

Cast

Charlotte Gainsbourg
Brigitte
Pete Doherty
Octave
August Diehl
Desgenais
Lily Cole
Elise

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Paris, 1830. Young libertine Octave meets Brigitte, a widower ten years older. Despite mutual attraction, Brigitte insists that their relationship remain platonic for three months, after which they can weigh up their feelings for each other. They eventually become lovers but remain suspicious of each other, and jealous arguments ensue. They move to Paris and start planning to leave France, and receive frequent visits from a friend of Brigitte's family, Henri Smith. One day, Octave returns home to find Brigitte playing the piano for Smith. Octave tells Brigitte he has arranged for them to depart France that very night, but she tells him she no longer loves him. He leaves.

Dead Europe

Australia/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Tony Krawitz
Certificate 18 83m 54s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Early on in *Dead Europe*, a newly widowed matriarch asserts that her late husband "is in heaven now... It's only Jews and Muslims who go to hell." The woman's appalled son, outspoken gay photographer Isaac (Ewen Leslie), is neither of these, despite the significance of his name, yet the jaundiced Europe he consequently traverses is nothing if not infernal.

Based on Christos Tsiolkas's provocative, macabre 2005 novel, Tony Krawitz's film is soaked in dread and doom from its unnerving opening frames. No sooner has Isaac declared that he is to visit Athens for an exhibition of his work than dad Vasili storms outside to ingest a handful of soil, utter an incantation and engineer his own death in a car wreck. Rubbishing his mother's intimations of a family curse but uneasy nonetheless, Isaac determines to transport Vasili's ashes from Australia to his ancestral Greek village.

As in the novel, the notion of a modern, integrated Europe is seen as bogus, a smokescreen. Tsiolkas's continent is an outsized necropolis, festering with barely contained religious and racial hatred, haunted by buried atrocities and irrevocably stained by ancient blood feuds. Germain McMicking's atmospheric, occasionally self-conscious camerawork hints at this incrementally, presenting a highly subjective view of Isaac's wanderings. Athens, Paris and Budapest are rendered sinister and disconnected, peopled by wary onlookers and lost souls, facades concealing political rancour and murky, transgressive underbellies.

Louise Fox's adaptation dramatically prunes Tsiolkas's expansive text, discarding some of its more outré – and bluntly symbolic – elements. Unfortunately, compressing the assorted weighty themes has the side effect of instilling scenes with a tone that constantly verges on hysterical. A laboured mid-section in Paris, where Isaac is asked to smuggle a virulently anti-

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Emile Sherman
Iain Canning
Liz Watts
Screenplay
Louise Fox
Based on the novel by Christos Tsiolkas
Cinematographer
Germain McMicking
Editors
Alexandre de Franceschi
Scott Gray
Production Designer
Fiona Crombie
Composer
Jed Kurzel
Sound Designer
Sam Petty
Costume Designer
Emily Seresin

@Screen Australia
Dead Europe Pty Limited, Screen NSW
Production Companies
Screen Australia presents in association with Screen NSW, Fulcrum

Media Finance and DeLuxe a See-Saw Films production in association with Porchlight Films
Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance
in association with DeLuxe Australia
Financed in association with Screen NSW
Principal development and production investor
Screen Australia

Cast

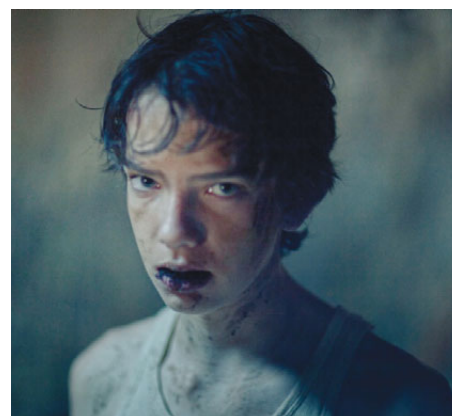
Ewen Leslie
Isaac
Marton Csokas
Nico
Jean-François Balmer
Gerry
Igal Naor
Syd
William Zappa
Vasili

Françoise Lebrun
Leah
Thanos Samaras
Andreas
Danae Skiadi
Giulia
Eugenia Fragos
Reveka
Ania Bukstein
Amina
Zozo Zarpa
blind woman
Kodi Smit-McPhee
Josef

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

7,551ft +0 frames



Infernal affairs: Marton Csokas

Semitic Muslim out of the country, perplexes rather than disturbs. And it doesn't help that Vasili's dark secret is eventually revealed in an ungainly slab of expository dialogue, by a character introduced mere minutes before.

Isaac brings to mind a young, hedonistic version of Harvey Keitel's filmmaker in Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995): both men roam ancestral homelands suffused with turbulent history, and both come to distrust the version of reality seen through their cameras. But where the former's odyssey was melancholic and contemplative, Isaac's is a ghastly downward spiral. The half-life of evil that pervades *Dead Europe* is the meat and potatoes of many a horror film, and Krawitz often employs generic tropes to depict Isaac's fractured mindset, aided by some disquieting sound design and Jed Kurzel's ominously rumbling score. Though this produces some dynamic individual sequences – a hypnosis session held in Vasili's village is particularly creepy – the connective tissue doesn't always convince. For material this bold and confrontational, it could have done with less bark and more bite. **S**

Australia, the present. After his father Vasili commits suicide, photographer Isaac ignores his mother's warnings of a family curse and decides to take Vasili's ashes to the family's ancestral village in Greece. In Athens, Isaac clashes with his estranged relatives over the true reasons behind Vasili's emigration. Isaac encounters a troubled teenager, Josef, who begs Isaac to help him. Isaac later returns to Josef's home only for neighbours to insist that he left long ago. At the village, hostile locals confirm that Vasili's name is cursed. A seer claims that a Jewish boy named Elias haunts Isaac's family. Isaac begins to experience disturbing visions of Josef. Gerry, an old friend of Vasili's, summons Isaac to Paris. He asks Isaac to smuggle a Muslim woman into Australia, but the woman – whose anti-Semitism enrages Isaac – is arrested beforehand. Mentally unravelling, Isaac travels on to Budapest to visit his brother Nico, finding him a junkie working for Jewish porn baron and sex trafficker Syd. Nico initially claims ignorance of anyone named Elias, but a meeting with Syd reveals otherwise. Nico finally reveals that Vasili had hidden Elias from the Nazis during WWII: in Vasili's absence, his relatives sexually abused the boy and left him to starve. Returning to find Elias barely alive and cursing his family, Vasili murdered him. Isaac pays Syd for the company of a teenager who appears to be Josef. 'Josef' fatally stabs Isaac and escapes.

Fun Size

USA 2012

Director: Josh Schwartz

Certificate 12A 90m 12s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Teen TV stars team with *Gossip Girl* writer Josh Schwartz for his directorial debut, a comedy about a Halloween night in suburban Cleveland. Victoria Justice (*Zoey 101*) stars as Wren, a teen saddled with babysitting her elusive younger brother Albert (Jackson Nicoll). Naturally, there's a cool party she and her image-obsessed friend April (Jane Levy) are desperate to attend and a lovelorn geek waiting in the wings.

Halloween, says Wren, is the one night when you can pretend to be someone you're not. But the truth will out. Wren's mother begins the evening in a schoolgirl's outfit and pigtails but soon feels out of place with her younger boyfriend and ends up bonding with his pal's parents ("Weren't you ahead of me in the queue for a mammogram last week?"). Meanwhile April is embarrassed to be seen with scholarly Peng but is surprised to find herself attracted to him.

Rather than offering vicarious aspirational thrills, *Fun Size* asks teens to accept their lot and act their age – all apart from eight-year-old Albert, who darts around in a Spider-Man suit befriending twentysomethings and dancing at discos. This precocious-kid comedy is what *Fun Size* does best, but it sits oddly alongside teen histrionics, midlife crises and the occasional burst of adult humour. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Stephanie Savage Josh Schwartz Bard Dorros David Kanter	Michael Beugg Steve Golin Paul Green	Sound In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Max Werner	Cast Victoria Justice	Distributor Paramount Pictures UK
Director of Photography Yaron Orbach	Wren Thomas Mann	8,118 ft +0 frames
Edited by Mike Sale Wendy Greene Bricmont	Roosevelt Jane Levy April Chelsea Handler Joy	
Production Designer Mark White	Thomas McDonell Aaron Riley	
Music Deborah Lurie	Osric Chau	
Sound Mixer Steven A. Morrow	Thomas Middleditch	
Costume Designer Eric Daman	Fuzzy Jackson Nicoll Albert Ana Gasteyer Jackie Josh Pence Keevin Kerri Kenney-Silver Barb	
	[uncredited] Johnny Knoxville Jorgen	
	Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital	

Cleveland, Ohio, Halloween night. Teenager Wren loses her younger brother Albert while trick-or-treating, and goes on an eventful search for him with friends April, Roosevelt and Peng. Meanwhile Albert befriends shop clerk Fuzzy. Wren and Albert's widowed mother Joy feels her age at a party full of younger people. Wren rejects popular boy Aaron Riley. After a prank, Albert is imprisoned by an angry victim; Wren and Fuzzy rescue him. Joy finds Wren and Albert near their father's grave. They return home to find Roosevelt, who tells Wren that he loves her; they kiss. Albert releases an internet video of Wren dancing embarrassingly.

Gambit

United Kingdom/USA 2012

Director: Michael Hoffman

Certificate 12A 89m 13s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Not since 1985's *Crimewave*, written for their friend and sometime collaborator Sam Raimi, have the Coen brothers entrusted one of their scripts to another director. That they've now done so with the heist comedy *Gambit*, a reworking of Ronald Neame's 1966 movie of the same title starring Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine, might suggest that they feel it isn't quite up to their highest standard. The assigned director, Michael Hoffman, is best known for period dramas (*Restoration*, *The Last Station*) and a multi-star version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though he has farce form with 1991's TV-soap bitchfest *Soapdish*.

The idea of remaking *Gambit* has been around for some 15 years, with various names attached as potential writers and/or directors: Aaron Sorkin, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Robert Altman, Alexander Payne. The Coens were first linked with the project around four years ago, though they always made it clear that they didn't plan to direct, perhaps mindful of their last ill-fated shot at remaking a British comedy, *The Ladykillers* (2004). Hoffman claims he's "not familiar with the original film, and all that the two have in common is that both films are about a man with a plan". Debatable, to say the least. In both, one Harry Dean(e) plans to scam a vastly rich man called Shabandar with the help of an exotic and seemingly naive female (MacLaine's Eurasian nightclub girl here becoming Cameron Diaz's Texas rodeo queen). Even more pointedly, both films start with the scam being carried off impeccably, only to scroll back and reveal this as Harry's wishful thinking. The real scam proves much more problematic.

Whatever its original provenance, the remastered *Gambit* doesn't lack for Coenesque quirks and curlicues. Stanley Tucci has particular fun with his dialogue as Teutonic art expert Martin Zaidenweber: vigorously working out in a gym, he announces, "I am gaily schvitzing away the kilos!" Like him, most of the characters are posited on a cartoonish level – not least Diaz's PJ Puznowski, sporting a shit-eating grin and a deep-fried Texas accent. As Lionel Shabandar,



In it for the Monet: Colin Firth, Cameron Diaz

Alan Rickman effortlessly projects arrogant contempt, even – or especially – when stark naked. And Tom Courtenay, in moustache and flat cap, quietly enjoys himself as art forger Major Wingate, supplying the occasional philosophical voiceover ("An optimist is simply a man who hasn't heard the news").

Amid all this, Colin Firth strives valiantly as central fall guy Harry Deane, placed at the receiving end of some weary farce routines – repeatedly punched in the face or losing his trousers. Even worse, at one point we seem to be heading into a know-yourself life-lesson moment, with PJ telling Harry, "You've got to stop trying to be something you're not." Altogether, *Gambit* feels like something of an offcut from the Coen workshop. But if you don't set your expectations too high, it certainly has its moments. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Mike Lobell Adam Ripp Rob Paris	Limited Production Companies CBS Films and Crime Scene Pictures present in association with ArtPhyl a Michael Lobell production A film by Michael Hoffman	Nelson-Wingate Stanley Tucci Martin Zaidenweber Julian Rhind-Tutt Xander Pip Torrens desk clerk Selina Cadell dowager Togo Igawa Shiri Takagawa
Screenplay Joel Coen Ethan Coen From the short story by Sidney Carroll	Executive Producers Rizal Risjad Philip Elway	Dolby Digital/ Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Florian Ballhaus	Cast Colin Firth Harry Deane Cameron Diaz PJ Puznowski Alan Rickman Lionel Shabandar Tom Courtenay Major Nigel	Distributor Momentum Pictures
Editor Paul Tothill		8,029 ft +8 frames
Production Designer Stuart Craig		
Music Composed and Conducted by Rolf Kent		
Sound Mixer John Casali		
Costume Designer Jenny Beaven		
@Gambit Pictures		

London, the present. Art curator Harry Deane works for arrogant media mogul Lionel Shabandar, who treats him with offhand contempt. Planning revenge, Harry recruits art forger Major Wingate to create a fake Monet, the long-lost 'Haystacks, Dusk', whose companion piece, 'Haystacks, Dawn', Shabandar already owns. The fake is planted in the trailer home of Texas rodeo queen PJ Puznowski, whose grandfather supposedly liberated the painting from Nazi hands. Harry tells PJ to ask £12 million for the Monet, keeping half a million for herself.

Though sceptical, Shabandar agrees to have PJ and the painting flown to London, where Harry authenticates it. Also interested is Japanese art collector Shiri Takagawa, whom Shabandar outbid for Haystacks, Dawn. Harry finds himself edged out; his boss, much taken with PJ, installs her at the Savoy Hotel and takes her to dinner. He also arranges to have the picture checked by German art expert Martin Zaidenweber, whom he plans to employ in place of Harry. Harry tricks his way into PJ's room at the Savoy, but makes a rapid exit when she and Shabandar arrive. On the way out he tries to steal a Ming vase, but succeeds only in losing his trousers.

Shabandar invites PJ to a grand party at his country estate. Gatecrashing, Harry substitutes the Major's fake 'Haystacks, Dawn' for the original. The security – a lion – alarms him, but PJ arrives and hogties the animal. Humiliating Zaidenweber by proving 'Dusk' to be a forgery, Harry quits Shabandar's service and leaves with PJ and Dawn. At Heathrow, seeing PJ off, he collects £12 million from Takagawa for the Monet.

Here Comes the Boom

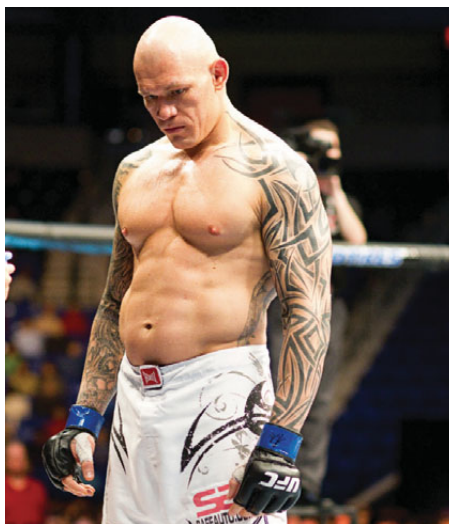
USA 2012
Director: Frank Coraci
Certificate 12A 104m 44s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Is this the best plan you could come up with?" asks school nurse Bella (Salma Hayek) when biology teacher Scott Voss (Kevin James) proposes entering a series of low-end Mixed Martial Arts tournaments to raise the \$48,000 required to keep beloved music teacher Marty Streb (Henry Winkler) in a job at his budget-stretched school. "Crazy," Bella concludes, knowing full well that Scott is a feckless 42-year-old whose glory days on the college wrestling team ended two decades earlier and who now can't even commit to teaching his own classes properly. Having given up the fight long ago, Scott plans to do just that in his matches too, accepting defeat and walking away with the consolation prize. "I can do this," he reassures Marty. "Lose." Yet once he is in the cage, amid all the grips and body blows, a revitalised Scott rediscovers the urge to win.

Bella has a point. The idea of schlubby Scott getting paid to lose matches against younger professional fighters seems nearly as ill-conceived as the prospect of him actually winning, and it would be all too easy to dismiss *Here Comes the Boom* as merely a freestyle mix-up of *Bad Teacher*, *Detachment* and *Warrior*; all filtered through the lowbrow sensibility of executive producer Adam Sandler (whose *The Wedding Singer*, *The Waterboy* and *Click* were also helmed by Frank Coraci). Yet here, much as co-writer/producer/star James has trained up and lost weight for the punishing lead part, the comedy too comes slimmed down, and is, despite the odd vomit gag, more restrained – which may for some mean less funny – than previous films from the Sadler/James stable. Aware that he is dealing in zero-to-hero cliché, Coraci traces Scott's underdog trajectory through the cursory medium of montage, while similarly skipping through his predictable romance with Bella.

With all else stripped down, what remains is national allegory. As Scott moonlights at a civics class for adults seeking US citizenship, his student Miguel (Shelly Desai), struggling with English, confuses the word 'suffrage' with



Playground scrap: Krzysztof Soszynski

'suffering', and to Scott's insistence that suffrage is nothing to do with pain, merely responds, "No pain no gain." This conflation of bodies politic and pummelled will provide a key subtext in a film whose resigned protagonist, faced with the effects of recession, comes back fighting, rediscovering his lost passions and inspiring others to do better themselves. It is an optimistic, almost Capraesque vision of the American Dream, though bruised and battered, re-emerging triumphant – indeed the film's final line, shouted by a newly naturalised Miguel, is "Viva America!" While the film's title derives ostensibly from the P.O.D song 'Boom', which Scott uses as his walk-on number at bouts, it encodes a vision of America's current economic bust returning to boom, fuelled by individual effort, collective support, outside assimilation and – surprisingly for an arena film – respect for the arts. Of course it would be crazy to imagine America's recovery stemming from middle-aged cage-fighting – but at a school whose debating society is first to be cut, at least Scott reopens the discussion in this quixotic sporting comedy. 📺

I, Anna

United Kingdom/Germany/France 2012
Director: Barnaby Southcombe
Certificate 15 91m 28s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Barnaby Southcombe's debut feature is far stronger on atmosphere and characterisation than it is on plausibility. Adapted from a New York-set novel by Elsa Lewin but with the action transferred to London, the film makes excellent use of locations ranging from the foreboding, maze-like Barbican complex to West End department stores and grimly luxurious hotels. Southcombe portrays London as a chilly, alienating metropolis, and that's certainly how it's experienced by the lead character, Anna Welles (played by the director's mother, Charlotte Rampling), a lonely and vulnerable woman in late middle age, desperately searching for love.

The plot begins to creak almost right from the outset. In an early scene we see Anna in a telephone box, contacting friends who turn out to have no time for her. She is an elegant, relatively affluent woman – so it may be nitpicking, but you can't help but wonder why she doesn't have a cell phone and why, on a cold autumnal day, she's using a public call box. Even given the sense of mystery you expect to find in a latterday *film noir* like this, Anna's behaviour isn't always easy to understand. The narrative is elliptical and full of flashbacks, with the key incident occurring at the start of the film, when Anna is taken home by a man she meets at a dating fair in a huge London hotel. An act of violence follows; Anna is confused by what has happened – and the audience is likely to be too. This is a film full of contrivances. For example, it seems just a little too coincidental that Anna, trying to retrieve her umbrella from a lift, should run into a detective who happens to be just as lovelorn as she is. Throughout, the filmmakers struggle to balance the thriller elements with the moody, character-based drama about a middle-aged love affair.

Rampling excels as the Miss Lonely Heart heroine, conveying both the character's coldness and her vulnerability. Gabriel Byrne is well cast too as the crumpled but charismatic detective who falls for her. They may be stock types but the actors have an obvious rapport. At times, the film seems like a British counterpart to Harold Becker's equally moody and intense *Sea of Love* (1989), in which Al Pacino's detective becomes



Shock and door: Charlotte Rampling

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Todd Garner
Kevin James
Written by
Allan Loeb
Kevin James
Director of Photography
Phil Méheux
Film Editor
Scott Hill
Production Designer
Perry Andelin Blake
Music
Rupert Gregson-Williams
Production Mixer
Anton Gold
Costume Designer
Hope Hanafin

©Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.
Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents a Hey Eddie, Broken Road, Happy

Madison production
A Frank Coraci movie
Executive Producers
Adam Sandler
Jack Giarraputo
Jeff Sussman
Marty P. Ewing

Cast

Kevin James
Scott Voss
Salma Hayek
Bella Flores
Henry Winkler
Marty Streb
Greg Germann
Principal Betcher
Joe Rogan
himself
Gary Valentine
Eric Voss
Charice
Malia
Bas Rutten
Niko
Reggie Lee
Mr De la Cruz

Shelly Desai
Miguel
Krzysztof Soszynski
Ken Dietrich

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

9,426 ft +0 frames

When budget cuts threaten his school's popular music programme, 42-year-old biology teacher Scott Voss volunteers to raise the \$48,000 required to keep inspirational music teacher Marty Streb in his job. Realising that even the losers at Mixed Martial Arts events are paid for their pains, Scott – who was a first-division wrestler in his college days – turns to Niko, a Dutch student in his adult citizenship class who also happens to be an MMA trainer, for help. After several defeats, Scott decides that it might be faster, and easier on his body, just to win. Impressed by Scott's tenacity, a professional trainer agrees to teach him. As Scott works his way up the MMA ranks, his victories cause him to re-engage with his teaching, galvanising his pupils and capturing the attention of school nurse Bella – who has for years rebuffed his advances. A last-minute dropout leads to Scott being invited to a top-division match in Vegas against reigning champion Ken Dietrich. With his accumulated winnings embezzled by the school's vice-principal, Scott must defeat Ken against all the odds for the full \$50,000 prize money. Inspired by the presence of his school's orchestra at the match, Scott wins the fight – and Bella's heart.

The Joy of Six

United Kingdom 2011-2012

Directors: various

Certificate 15 79m 6s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Sponsored by Soda Pictures' New British Cinema Quarterly distribution initiative, *The Joy of Six* is a compilation of half a dozen recent British short films. Unlike similar portmanteau arrangements, they've thankfully avoided any framing or linking devices (the only common ground being a coincidental, nationally characteristic fondness for dark-to-black comedy), and the project's talent-showcase ambitions are boosted by a quality threshold that's impressively and pleasurably high.

Snappiest of the bunch is Dan Sully's kebab-shop urban legend *The Ellington Kid*. In just three and a half minutes (plus credits), it delivers a nicely paced build-up to a punchline that can be spotted several seconds before it dawns

on hapless protagonist Beefy that his friend Nathan's joke is on him – but that's part of the fun. Former Jesus and Mary Chain bassist Douglas Hart's *...Long Distance Information* also builds to a punchline, but here it has the effect of flipping the story on its head and making the emotional distance between 20-year-old Alex and his father all the more poignantly palpable: how estranged from your family do you have to be to make the kind of mistake he makes during their Christmas Day phone conversation? Hart packs an impressive amount into just six minutes of live action, conveying the squalor of Alex's present existence through the muffled sound of neighbours fighting, while on the other end of the telephone line, the lounge and kitchen occupied by the notionally married Peter



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Felix Vossen Christopher Simon Michael Eckelt Written by Ilann Girard Barnaby Southcombe Based on the novel by Elsa Lewin Director of Photography Ben Smithard Editor Peter Boyle Production Designer Tom Burton Music K> <D Sound Design Stephan Konken Hartmut Teschemacher Costume Designer Pam Downe ©Anna Productions Ltd/Riva 2011 UG (H.B.)/Arsam International SARL Production Companies	Global Screen and Exponential Media present In association with Greenstreet Entertainment and the support of Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein and Deutscher Filmförderfonds An Embargo Films, Riva Film, Arsam International production Executive Producers Paul Steadman Thorsten Ritter Cast Charlotte Rampling Anna Welles Gabriel Byrne D.C.I. Bernie Reid Eddie Marsan D.J. Kevin Franks Jodhi May Janet Stone Ralph Brown George Stone Max Deacon	Stevie Honor Blackman Joan Hayley Atwell Emmy Caroline Catz Louise Bryan Dick D.C. Hicock Nav Sidhu D.C. Brooks Ashley Taylor-Rhys P.C. Childs Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Artificial Eye Film Company 2,823 ft +0 frames
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London, the present. Anna Welles is a mature woman, separated from her husband. She works in a department store and has taken to attending speed-dating events. At one of these events she meets a seemingly charming man called George Stone and goes back with him to his apartment in the Barbican. Anna kills Stone by bludgeoning him with a sculpture after he tries to assault her. Later, as she is retrieving her umbrella from a lift in the building, Anna runs into Bernie Reid, a detective investigating the incident. Bernie begins to tail Anna. She seems to have suppressed her memories of the incident in which Stone died, though she has a badly hurt arm. She tries to fit back into her old routine of working and helping her daughter, a single mother, with childcare. Bernie arranges to meet Anna at a dating event and they start going out. It transpires that George Stone had a reputation for violence. The police discover that he was bludgeoned to death with a blunt object, probably a work of art. George's troubled teenage son Stevie becomes the prime suspect – he had interrupted George when he was trying to seduce Anna. Gradually, Bernie teases from Anna what really happened on the evening she met Stone. She becomes ever more preoccupied; she forgets that she is supposed to be looking after her grandchild, who is run over after wandering into the road.

Bernie takes Anna back to Stone's Barbican flat and she locks herself in. She is on the ledge, on the verge of suicide, when Bernie reaches her and pulls her back into the apartment.

Credits and Synopsis

...Long Distance Information (2011) Directed by Douglas Hart Produced Beth Montague Ohna Falby Written by Douglas Hart Director of Photography Stuart Bentley Film Editor Dan Robinson Production Designer Louise Corcoran ©Douglas Hart Production Companies An HIS London production Shorts Film Fund, Film London, UK Film Council Lottery funded, Skillset Executive Producer Nicola Doring Cast Peter Mullan Alex's dad Alan Tripeny Alex [2.35:1] 7m 42s	Man in Fear (2011) Director William Jewell Producer Daniel Nixon Writer William Jewell Director of Photography Dominic Jones Editor David Wigram Art Director Sophie Wyatt ©UK Film Council and Screen South Production Companies The UK Film Council and Screen South present Made with the support of the UK Film Council's New Cinema Fund UK Film Council Lottery funded Fractured Films Executive Producers Nicole Dade David Castro Kate O'Hara Cast Luke Treadaway Anthony Fox James Lance Ian Gilchrist Tim Healy Constable Brown [2.35:1] 10m 50s	A Gun for George (2011) Directed by Matthew Holness Produced by Peter Carlton Ally Gippis Written by Matthew Holness Director of Photography David Rom Editor Nick Fenton Production Designer Alison Butler ©Channel Four Television Corporation and UK Film Council Production Companies Film 4 and the UK Film Council present a Warp Films production of a Matthew Holness film Made with the support of the UK Film Council's New Cinema Fund UK Film Council Lottery funded Executive Producers Rebecca Mark-Lawson Jo McLellan Cast Matthew Holness Terry Finch/George Roger Ashton-Griffiths Mr Maddock Joseph Bailey Ron [1.78:1] 17m 22s	Scrubber (2011) Directed by Romola Garai Produced by Shona Kerr Romola Garai Written by Romola Garai Director of Photography Kate Reid Editor Alastair Reid Production Designer Caroline Collinge Production Company A Label Pictures production Cast Amanda Hale Jenny Honor Kneafsey girl Steven Robertson husband Michelle Duncan neighbour Martin Savage stranger [2.35:1] 20m 56s	The Ellington Kid (2012) Directed by Dan Sully Producer Rob Watson Written by Dan Sully Director of Photography Christopher Sabogal Editor Dan Sully Production Designer Anna Rhodes ©Dan Sully, The Love Commercial Production Company and Escape Films Executive Producers Mike Elliott Jim Mooney Walli Ullah Simon Curtis Cast Charlie G. Hawkins Nathan Hammed Animashaun Beefy Durassie Kiangangu the Ellington kid Haydar Koyel kebab shop worker [2.35:1] 5m	Friend Request Pending Directed by Chris Foggin Producer Chris Croucher Written by Chris Croucher Director of Photography Simon Tindall Edited by Christopher Ranson Production Design Lisa McDiarmid Production Companies EMU presents Executive Producers Mike Elliott Jim Mooney Walli Ullah Simon Curtis Cast Judi Dench Mary Penny Ryder Linda Philip Jackson Trevor Tom Hiddleston Tom John Macmillan Jason [2.35:1] 11m 58s All films in colour Distributor Soda Pictures 7,119 ft +0 frames
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A collection of six British short films. '...Long Distance Information': Alex rings his long-estranged father on Christmas Day and they talk for the first time in years, consciously suppressing their emotions; a reference to a non-existent sister reveals that Alex has dialled a wrong number. 'Man in Fear': paranoid coach-crash survivor Anthony Fox visits a police station and explains to an indifferent desk sergeant that the 'accidents' he witnesses are a project by conceptual artist Ian Gilchrist; after failing to get himself arrested, Fox is run over. 'A Gun for George': novelist Terry Finch is derided by people who don't appreciate that his lurid paperbacks about a vigilante called 'The Reprisalizer' have helped him to exorcise memories of his brother George's death. Terry's dying friend Ron bequeaths him his possessions, including a gun, and Terry considers

realising his violent fantasies. 'Scrubber': Jenny leaves her daughter with a neighbour and walks into the countryside, where she has sex with a passing driver. Her husband returns, and they discuss the experience (he was the driver). The next time, Jenny is picked up by a stranger. 'The Ellington Kid': Nathan tells Beefy about a recent stabbing, after which the victim was chased into the South London kebab shop where the pair are currently eating – but the attackers hadn't reckoned on the kebab-shop staff, who had bigger knives. Beefy is suspicious about the contents of his burger. 'Friend Request Pending': with the help of her equally elderly friend Linda, Mary grapples with social-networking etiquette while chatting online with local choirmaster Trevor. When Linda goes out shopping, Mary and Trevor continue conversing by phone and arrange a date.

➔ Mullan and Caroline Paterson seem as far apart as the distance between Alex's adopted London and his East Kilbride roots.

Will Jewell's *Man in Fear* is a wittily mocking riff on Karlheinz Stockhausen's notorious comment about the 9/11 terrorist attacks being readable as a work of conceptual art, positing that a sufficiently obsessed artist (James Lance) might deliberately engineer a fatal accident as part of a gallery commission. Although Luke Treadaway's sweatily paranoid turn as the intended victim means that it works as a straightforward Kafkaesque suspenser, the bulk of the entertainment comes from spotting numerous references to conceptual art through the ages.

A Gun for George is the other overtly satirical piece, this time exploring the disturbed mindset of pulp novelist Terry Finch (played by writer-director Matthew Holness, best known for *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace*). Although a reference to online publication suggests a present-day setting, Finch's own clock seems to have stopped in the 1970s, the decade when his brother met a violent, untimely death that has overshadowed everything Finch has done since. He sees everything in faded colours through film-dirt speckles, drives a red Austin Allegro, and his early clashes with publishers and librarians drink from the same wellspring as the BBC's out-of-time TV series *Life on Mars* (2006-07), before his unexpected acquisition of a real gun opens up the possibility of him living out his fantasies as vigilante antihero 'The Reprisalizer'.

The longest and most substantial film is the haunting *Scrubber*. Although its synopsis suggests another punchline-driven structure, debutant director (and established actress) Romola Garai is much more interested in exploring the ineffable pull of what psychogeographers call 'edgelands' – those unpindownable, not-quite-urban, not-quite-rural spaces on the periphery of towns and cities. Of all the filmmakers in this collection, she makes the most imaginative use of the wide 2.35:1 aspect ratio (shared by all the shorts except *A Gun for George*), often framing her protagonist Jenny (Amanda Hale) dead centre as though she's unable to choose between her obsessive-compulsive cleaning routines in her pristine white home and her equally primal urge for anonymous alfresco sex. Garai cites Lynne Ramsay and Lucile Hadzihalilovic (*Innocence*) as influences, and she doesn't quite emerge from their shadow here – but much of *Scrubber* is resonant enough to suggest that her directing career will be well worth tracking. But the sweetest-natured film is *Friend Request Pending*, a romantic comedy by Chris Fogglin that gets its comedic mileage from OAP Mary (Judi Dench, clearly enjoying herself immensely) and her struggles with both the etiquette of online dating and the decidedly foreign language associated with it. Does 'LOL' mean 'lots of love' or 'laugh out loud'? And should you use it even when you're not literally laughing? It comes as little surprise that both she and her intended switch to more traditional communication methods, though a coda suggests that the encroachment of the elderly into the virtual world is only just beginning. 📺

Life Just Is

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Alex Barrett



Ordinary people: Jack Gordon, Nathaniel Martello-White, Fiona Ryan

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Alex Barrett's debut feature starts unpromisingly enough. Under the credits, we hear saccharine music and clichéd dialogue: "I needed to be sure that I wasn't making a mistake... I love you Jenny, and if you want me to stay – I will." But it's soon revealed that what we're hearing is the ending of a cheesy romcom which four of the five principal characters are watching on DVD, and their diverse reactions to it serve to introduce them.

Barrett, who acknowledges the influence of Bergman and Dreyer, has stated his intention of making "a drama that was anti-dramatic", and the implicit shrug of the title carries through into the action, or lack of it. The film covers a week in the lives of his five recently graduated young Londoners, during which time nothing startling happens. Jay starts an affair with an older man, Bobby, but she can't commit to it and so he breaks off with her. Tom and Claire teeter on the edge of becoming lovers but don't quite manage it. Tom sees a bearded man in the street who he thinks – on no particular evidence – may be a terrorist. A mutual friend dies. And Pete, going through a crisis of faith, pores over Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky before reaching the shattering conclusion that, "Maybe for me searching for the answer is the answer."

As this demonstrates, the dialogue is deliberately flat and banal – no slick sitcom wisecracking here. The nearest we get to a verbal riff is a boring guy at Jay's birthday party who bangs on at length about déjà vu and teapots. This in fact is the film's strength: the sheer drab ordinariness of the characters, and of what they say, makes them sympathetic in a way their hyped-up counterparts of *The Inbetweeners* or *Fresh Meat* could never be. The tone of undemonstrative realism is enhanced by the absence of non-diegetic music.

Barrett favours long-held, contemplative, static shots, and sometimes continues to hold them, Ozu-like, after everyone has vacated the frame. Storylines remain mostly unresolved: Tom's sinister bearded character glimpsed in the street is neither unmasked as a terrorist nor defused as a harmless passer-by, and at the end of the film the incipient affair between Claire and Tom is as incipient as ever. Altogether *Life Just Is* offers an amiable, slightly too relaxed but thoroughly watchable study in urban

naturalism, a slice of life that, contrary to Hitchcock's famous aphorism, never aspires to the status of cake. Next time it would be good to see Barrett's evident talents turned to something a touch more demanding. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tom Stuart	in association with Stanley Road Productions	Rachel Bright Anna
Written by Alex Barrett	Executive	Jason Croot
Cinematography Yosuke Kato	Producers Graeme Fry	Vanessa Govinden
Edited by Murat Kebir	Christine Hartland	Michelle
Production Design Niina Topp		Andrew Hawley
Music Supervisor James McWilliam	Cast	Nick
Location Sound Jason Creasey	Will De Meo	Joshua Osei
Costume Design Charmaine Parram	David	Vince
	Jack Gordon	In Colour
	Pete	[1.78:1]
	Nathaniel	Distributor
	Martello-White	Life Just Is Ltd
	Tom	
	Fiona Ryan	
	Claire	
	Jayne Wisener	
	Jay	
	Paul Nicholls	
	Bobby	
	Productions present	

North London, the present. University graduates Pete, Tom and David share a flat; their female friends Claire and Jay share a house nearby. Pete is currently unemployed; the other four have uninspiring jobs. Pete is obsessed to the point of neurosis with the existence or non-existence of God. Tom, who's black, and David, who's gay, are more easygoing. Tom and Claire are attracted to each other. Jay has just started an affair with Bobby, an IT operative in his mid-thirties. We follow them through a week of their lives.

Saturday: Pete, Tom, David and Claire watch a banal romcom on DVD. Returning home, Claire overhears Jay and Bobby having sex. **Sunday:** Jay brings Bobby to the men's flat; it's an awkward meeting. **Monday:** Claire hears that a friend of theirs, John, has died aged 25. Pete has a nightmare about God and St Francis. **Tuesday:** Tom tries to laugh Pete out of his fears; in the street he sees a bearded man who he thinks may be a terrorist. Jay resists Bobby's suggestion that they go away together for the weekend. **Wednesday:** Pete, Tom and David organise a birthday party for Jay in their flat. She is unhappy because Bobby is meeting an ex-girlfriend. Claire gets drunk and kisses Vince, a workmate of Tom's. **Thursday:** Claire tries to apologise to Tom but he's preoccupied with the mysterious bearded man. Pete has another nightmare. **Friday:** Pete frantically thumbs through Dostoyevsky's 'The Devils'. Bobby and Jay break up. All five friends attend a fireworks party and raise a glass to John's memory.

Love Bite

United Kingdom
Director: Andy De Emmony
Certificate 15 90m 36s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Director Andy De Emmony made a hash of the BBC's recent remounting of M.R. James's *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, and does no better in this dispiriting horror comedy – which similarly sets the supernatural loose in a miserable British holiday spot. Some thought has gone into the creation of Rainmouth, a drabbed-down version of Clacton, which is the home of a particularly unappealing type of square pie (the 'Bunty') and a down-at-heel funfair where a quartet of horny, inept, obnoxious teenagers loiter throughout the film.

The teenage fumbblings unbalance the *American Werewolf*-style horror/romance elements with an excess of gross-out, beside-the-point comedy which seldom manages to raise a laugh. This feels like something given the greenlight on the assumption that *Lesbian Vampire Killers* would be a hit and create a whole British subgenre, only to be reconceived midstream as an *Inbetweeners* cash-in without quite understanding why *The Inbetweeners* worked. When the CGI creature finally appears, it is on a par with recent direct-to-DVD werewolves (*The Howling Reborn*, *Werewolf: The Beast Among Us*) but swiftly dispatched to make way for a cynical, cruel punchline that underlines the mean spirits of the proceedings. As Scots-funded teen-themed werewolf films go, this is much less worthwhile than *Wild Country* or *Outcast*. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Bernstein
Douglas Rae
Paul Ritchie

Written by
Ron Blaney
Cris Cole

Director of Photography
Tat Radcliffe

Edited by
Mark Platts-Mill
Dan Farrell

Production Designer
Mike Gunn

Original Music by
Nick Green

Sound Mixer
Alastair Mason
Costume Designer
Anna Robbins

©Company
Production Companies
Westend Films
and Creative
Scotland present
An Ecosse Films

production Executive Producers
Sharon Harel
Mark Woolley
Maya Ansellem
Eve Schoukroun

Cast
Jessica Szohr
Juliana
Ed Speelers
Jamie

Luke Pasqualino
Kev

Adam Leese
PC Gilkes

Kierston Wareing
Natalie
Robert Pugh
Sergeant Rooney

Timothy Spall
Sid

Joy McAvoy
Berit
Mel Oskar
Agna

Daniel Kendrick
Spike

Robin Morrissey
Bruno
Denise Mack
Linda

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

8,154 ft +0 frames

Rainmouth, a British seaside resort, the present. Virginal teenager Jamie is attracted to Juliana, a mysterious American travel journalist. Werewolf-hunter Sid, a guest in Jamie's mother's hotel, claims Juliana is the beast that has lately taken to savaging local virgins. Eventually, Juliana admits that she's a werewolf-hunter too, and reveals that she is using Jamie as bait to attract the creature – who turns out to be local policeman Sergeant Rooney. Juliana and Jamie kill the monster but Juliana is scratched and infected. Jamie willingly becomes a werewolf to mate with Juliana. They relocate to America – near a Christian community with a virginity tradition – to hunt together.

Love Crime

France 2010
Director: Alain Corneau
Certificate 15 106m 30s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Bristling office rivalry in specifically female form is hardly anything new, given that the subject has already spawned material as diverse as Mike Nichols's *Working Girl* (1988) and Patrick Stettner's *The Business of Strangers* (2001). One of the puzzling things about *Love Crime*, Alain Corneau's last completed film (he died aged 67 in 2010), is that its escalating claws-out conflict is presented with such high-toned astringency that you feel there must be something terribly daring or special going on. Which, unfortunately, there isn't. No fault of Kristin Scott Thomas, it has to be said: she brings her full ice-queen presence to the role of power-hungry corporate higher-up Christine, who displays not a shred of hesitation in exploiting the hard graft of Ludvine Sagnier's workaholic underling Isabelle and taking the credit for herself. She justifies it as a combination of teamwork and character building, but when we see Sagnier alone in her minimally furnished home, it's obvious that the punishing emptiness of her existence is not going to be tenable over the longer term.

The worm is surely ready to turn, and how that might prove possible given the iron grip of Christine's control-freakery provides the intrigue that moves the plot forward. In the early exchanges, the film does rather well by its overfamiliar template (which goes back to *All About Eve* if not before), bracingly marking out the cold cunning with which Christine identifies and attacks her junior's weakest spot – her unfulfilled emotional yearning. When Christine baits the trap with her own lover, a handsome but vapid finance wizard who's not as clever as he likes to think he is, she unwittingly unleashes the sinister developments of the film's rather less engrossing later stages. Let's just say that the second word of the title hints at the story's quantum shift.

For subsequent events to compel the attention, Sagnier has to convince us that her character is able to connect to a deep reservoir



Work inexperience: Ludvine Sagnier

of anger when she reaches her lowest ebb, but the young actress is less and less effective as her role becomes ever more demanding. She's even more exposed here than she was opposite Charlotte Rampling's serene assurance in François Ozon's *Swimming Pool* (2003), which is deeply problematic since there comes a time when she has to carry the movie on her own.

Corneau's direction is certainly briskly confident, keeping the viewer alert by often cutting to the next scene just half a moment before we expect. For an often undervalued director whose eclectic filmography veers from Gallic hardboiled fare (*Série noire*) to Foreign Legion adventure (*Fort Saganne*) and the brooding mysteries of baroque music (*Tous les matins du monde*), it's a surprise that he revisited the dark recesses of the corporate landscape relatively soon after his Tokyo-set cautionary tale *Fear and Trembling*, and something of a disappointment too that this final effort rather slides away into fairly academic plot-spinning just as the story begins to get more chewy and interesting. The casting, one supposes, was intended to suggest an uneven match to begin with, but the degree to which Scott Thomas outclasses her co-star in the end proves counterproductive, even if it also provides the film's strongest moments. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Said Ben Said
Screenplay/ Adaptation/ Dialogue
Alain Corneau
Natalie Carter
Director of Photography
Yves Angelo

Supervising Editor
Thierry Derocles
Production Designer
Katia Wyszok

Music
Pharoah Sanders
Sound
Jean-Paul Mugal

Jean-Paul Hurier
Costume Designer
Khadija Zeggai

©SBS Films, France 2
Cinéma, Divali Films
Production Companies
UGC presents an SBS
Films production
in co-production with
France 2 Cinéma

and Divali Films
in association with
Sofica UGC 1
with the participation
of Canal +,
CinéCinéma, France
Télévisions
with the support of La
région Île de France

Cast
Ludvine Sagnier
Isabelle
Kristin Scott Thomas
Christine
Patrick Mille
Philippe
Guillaume Marquet
Daniel
Gérald Laroche
Gérard
Julien Rochefort
lawyer
Olivier Rabourdin
judge
Marie Guillard
Claudine

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Verve Pictures Ltd

9,585ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
Crime d'Amour

France, the present. Junior executive Isabelle works hard to impress her boss Christine, head of the Paris branch of an international corporation with headquarters in New York. Christine unashamedly takes advantage of Isabelle's research, claiming the credit for herself, though she does allow Isabelle to negotiate a successful deal in Cairo. During the Cairo trip, Isabelle sleeps with Christine's lover, financial consultant Philippe. Isabelle gains the confidence to act independently and, with help from colleague Daniel, outshines Christine during a key visit from the New York top brass. Christine takes her revenge, signalling that she had planned Isabelle's affair with Philippe and forcing him to terminate the liaison, much to Isabelle's distress – which Christine then humiliatingly exposes at a company soirée. The distraught Isabelle conjures up an elaborate plan to kill Christine and make herself the chief suspect. After fatally stabbing Christine in her home, Isabelle is charged with murder. She reveals to the investigating judge an array of evidence – which she has arranged in advance – seemingly proving that she cannot be the killer. She is released and returns to work, where she exposes Philippe's financial misdeeds, thus earning a high-level promotion. However, Daniel lets Isabelle know that he has been tracking her scheming.

The Man with the Iron Fists

USA/People's Republic of China 2012

Director: RZA

Certificate 18 95m 36s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Robert 'RZA' Diggs, director of *The Man with the Iron Fists*, is already secure in his legend, since he is largely responsible for one of the few time-capsule effects of end-of-the-millennium pop culture. The 1993 Wu-Tang Clan album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* was a disc of trunk-rattling basement beats and junkyard-dog aggression, distinguished from garden-variety hoodie hardcore by its refined, individuated aesthetic, one that had grown as naturally as fungus in the so-near-yet-so-far isolation of Staten Island, forged of bootleg-buying missions into Chinatown's video stores, after-school afternoons in front of David Carradine's Shaolin monk, and swapped copies of *Shang-Chi: Master of Kung Fu* or *Power Man and Iron Fist*.

A great deal of Wu-Tang Clan's appeal could be connected to the group's hydra-headed nature, which offered a pantheistic surplus of distinct and vivid personalities for a listener to interface with. But inasmuch as any single author of the Wu-Tang mythology can be pointed to, it's Diggs, the group's producer and architect of the world-conquering five-year plan which ended with the double LP *Wu-Tang Forever*, the hubristic million-dollar rap video for 'Triumph' and innumerable Wu-Tang cash-ins. There was Wu-Wear. There was the PlayStation four-way fighting game *Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style*, with accessorised 'W' controllers. There were beer commercials with Ghostface shooting laser beams from his fingertips. And, in the natural course of events, there was talk of a movie – a tie-in to RZA's 1998 solo album *Bobby Digital in Stereo* which has since become the stuff of legend among Wu completists, second only to Guided by Voices scholars in their exhaustive research and documentation.

Well, almost 20 years after *Enter the Wu-Tang* and a decade after Method Man in *How High*, the nearest thing we're likely to see to a Wu-Tang tie-in movie has finally come along, hopping off with *36 Chambers* cut 'Shame on a Nigga' and a melee of knockabout wire-fighting. It is titled *The Man with the Iron Fists*, it was shot last year in China with an English-speaking cast including Russell Crowe and Lucy Liu, and it is altogether a bit of a mess.

This is not to say that *The Man with the Iron Fists* isn't frequently an entertaining movie. It feels very much like the product of someone who has been drawing comics since he was ten years old, who at the age of 42 decided to incorporate every single character design and act of unimaginable violence that he'd ever dreamed up, sketched out or ripped off into a 96-minute package. It is difficult not to be a little charmed by such over-eagerness.

In what's been generally regarded as a questionable decision, RZA himself plays the Blacksmith, who will become the eponymous character after a lovingly shot double amputation. RZA is roughly as capable an actor as Quentin Tarantino, who grants his imprimatur to *Iron Fists* with a 'presents' credit, evident payback for RZA's *Kill Bill* soundtracking. (Eli Roth is credited as co-writer.) Though he is a drowsy screen presence, RZA's putting himself front and centre only adds to the crooked,



Sham-fisted: Lucy Liu

handcrafted quality of *Iron Fists* – it's a bit like a \$20 million amateur movie. The film even becomes unexpectedly touching during an extended flashback which explains the exotic presence of the black Blacksmith in China, in which RZA is seen running away from an American plantation (his mother is played by Pam Grier), being lost at sea, then washing ashore in the East, where he is initiated into the tenets of Buddhism – a pretty piece of pop autobiography. (It also jogs memories of the 'racial draft' skit from *Chappelle's Show*.)

The fight scenes, of which there are many, mostly pass in rushes of disorientation, gushes of spouting gore and the flutter of snapping clothes. The soundtrack has some hitting head-nodders but they rarely lock with the image in any meaningful way. But if RZA is less than the complete filmmaker, his ambition is winning, and a coordinated stealth strike in the Pink Blossom brothel is a neatly turned set

piece. (Unlikely as it may seem, *The Hollywood Reporter* has already connected the tyro director to John Milius's Genghis Khan biopic.)

The dialogue in *Iron Fists* seems to have been written through the same cut-and-paste sampling method that plucked the interstitials for Wu albums from dubbed Shaw Brothers chop-socky ("Bring me some golden nectar, quickly"). It is impossible to imagine what levels of indecipherability the film might've reached without RZA's guiding voiceover, which also contributes some moments of moderate amusement. Otherwise the main attraction is an ungirdled Russell Crowe, quaffing from decanters, hovering over heaps of writhing whores while brandishing sex toys and referring to his penis as "the baby's arm" and taking evident pleasure in pronouncing lines such as "I seek no quarrel with you my stout fellow" – a fitting greeting to this avid, daffy pile-up of scenes. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Marc Abraham
Eric Newman
Eli Roth

Screenplay

RZA

Story

RZA

Director of Photography

Chan Chi Ying

Editor

Joe D'Augustine

Production Designer

Drew Boughton

Music

RZA

Howard Drossin

Production

Sound Mixers

A: Steve Chan

Wai Hung

B: Huang Xun

Costume Designer

Thomas Chong

Visual Effects

Centro Digital

Pictures, Ltd

Gradient Effects

Gradient Effects,

Istanbul

Post Matters

Stunt Supervisor

Guo Jian Young

Martial Arts

Choreographer

Corey Yuen

@Iron Fists, LLC

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

and Quentin Tarantino

present a Strike

Entertainment /

Arcade Pictures

production

A film by RZA

Produced with the

assistance of China

Film Co-production

Corporation

and Shanghai Film

Group Corporation

Executive Producers

Tom Karnowski

Thomas A. Bliss

Kristel Laiblin

Doris Tse

Cast

Russell Crowe

Jack Knife

Cung Lee

Bronze Lion

Lucy Liu

Madam Blossom

Byron Mann

Silver Lion

RZA

Blacksmith

Rick Yune

Zen Yi, The X-Blade

David Bautista

Brass Body

Jamie Chung

Lady Silk

Daniel Wu

Poison Dagger

Zhu Zhu

Chi Chi

Dolby Digital/

DataSat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

8,604 ft +0 frames

Jungle Village, China, the 19th century. The village blacksmith, who is of African descent, narrates a tale of the ongoing internecine violence that has supplied him with a booming trade. Most recently, Golden Lion, charged with carrying the emperor's gold, has been betrayed and assassinated by his supposed allies, Silver Lion and Bronze Lion. X-Blade, Golden's son, seeks revenge; the emperor dispatches killer duo the Geminis to retrieve his property; and a libertine Englishman with unclear motives, Jack Knife, saunters into town, taking a room at the brothel operated by

Madame Blossom. The Geminis are dispatched by a shadowy affiliate of the Lions; X-Blade is trounced by a super-strong mercenary called Brass Body. Having gone to X-Blade's aid, the Blacksmith has his arms hacked off for his trouble, after which Jack nurses him back to health. Forging himself new iron fists, the Blacksmith joins Jack, X-Blade and Madame Blossom in a stealth assault on the Lions and their allies, the beginning of a score-settling battle. The Lions and their allies are vanquished. The Blacksmith vows to forge no more weapons of war.

McCullin

United Kingdom 2012
Directors: Jacqui Morris, David Morris

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Although aesthetic philosophers have endlessly debated the comparative merits of photography and other visual arts, one aspect in which photography undoubtedly trumps every other medium is its ability to freeze time into a split-second instant, with the skill of the photographer relying just as much on what the pioneering French photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson called "the decisive moment" as on the traditional tools of posing and composition.

Given the extreme subjects that he has specialised in covering, the war photographer Don McCullin (b. 1935) is acutely aware that his pictures involve a whole host of decisive moments alongside the essential one of when to press the shutter. Should he take the picture at all? Will he put his subject and/or himself at personal risk by doing so? If he photographs someone in extreme pain, near death or actually dead, is he trampling on their dignity (and that of their relatives) to boost his own reputation? Is there a danger of the photograph being misinterpreted by people seeking to glorify war or propagandise for one particular side? And, bearing in mind the reason that he's in the country in the first place, is it newsworthy?

A highly articulate and intelligent man, McCullin has clearly thought deeply about these issues throughout a career spanning more than half a century. Jacqui and David Morris's appropriately no-frills portrait devotes the bulk of its running time to its subject either talking directly to camera or over dozens of his images, with only occasional recourse to context-setting intertitles, news footage and archive interviews. Although it's not apparent from the evidence on screen, the 75-year-old McCullin was seriously ill when the film was made. Happily, he's recovered since, but it's given his interviews the urgency of a final testament that's entirely fitting.

An edition of the BBC's *Parkinson*, complete with audience laughter, reveals another ethical dilemma: that of McCullin potentially being regarded as a showbiz celebrity while his subjects were unable to flee their war-torn surroundings alongside him. A similar culture clash is illustrated by Sir Harold Evans, the film's only other onscreen interviewee, as he describes the problem of presenting McCullin's retina-searing images in the *Sunday Times* colour supplement, often behind a calculatedly provocative cover. With a famously hands-off proprietor like Lord Thomson, this was easy to facilitate, but when Rupert Murdoch took over the paper in 1981 he tacitly made it clear that advertisers weren't happy about sharing magazine space with McCullin's work.

The bulk of the running time is devoted to the photographs themselves, fleshed out by their creator's vivid descriptions of the circumstances under which they were taken. Photographing the victims of a recent massacre in Cyprus, he was struck by the way their blood was still warm from the sun's heat, and embarrassed when observed at work by their relatives. A shot of a man throwing a grenade was immediately followed by the hand that tossed it being pulverised by a sniper's bullet. A naked Biafran famine victim, clearly near



Shutter island: 'McCullin'

death, is posed in a way that preserves her dignity without sacrificing the picture's intended impact. He also describes potential pictures that, for various diplomatic reasons, he didn't take – and also pictures whose most salient detail he didn't spot at the time, such as the woman cowering in a Belfast doorway as a group of heavily armed Paras runs past.

He's struck by the way many of his images echo the work of artists from the pre-photography era. A bullet-riddled soldier being helped by two comrades is caught in a classic Christ pose, while Goya's paintings observed what McCullin's photographs often demonstrate: that people in war zones facing imminent death

or who are in a state of extreme grief often look heavenwards, as though involuntarily seeking some form of spiritual salvation (McCullin's own work has often been compared with Goya's, not least by Cartier-Bresson). He admits that his studies of homeless and destitute people look Hogarthian, but he tells their stories and gives them names and voices.

The film emphasises the considerable physical risks that McCullin has taken. Many war photographers have died in action, including predecessors such as Robert Capa and successors like Tim Hetherington, and McCullin himself was seriously injured in Cambodia in 1970. There are other less immediately perilous pressures: McCullin says that it would be impossible to work in a current war theatre such as Afghanistan with anything like the freedom he enjoyed in Vietnam, and realised that his career as a war photographer might be entering its twilight when he was controversially refused permission to cover the Falklands in 1982. Evans resigned shortly afterwards (by then he was editor of the *Times*) and McCullin would shoot one more story, covering the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon, before leaving the *Sunday Times* himself after recognising that Evans's successor Andrew Neil's emphasis on 'life and leisure' was effectively shutting him out.

Photographers may be disappointed by the lack of technical information: McCullin is far more interested in the environment in which the images were created. There's also little about his family life, aside from a brief allusion to its frequent disruption, and although he remains active as a photographer to this day, the last three decades are skipped over in a few brisk minutes. But these are minor quibbles when set against the incendiary power and moral force of the images from McCullin's heyday, which alone more than justify a big-screen release. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Jacqui Morris	©[TBC]	In Colour
Directors of Photography Richard Stewart Michael Wood	Production Companies British Film Company, Rankin Film Productions, Frith Street Films	Distributor Artificial Eye Film Company
Editors Andy McGraw David Fairhead	Executive Producers Christopher Hird Rankin Steve Milne Christian Eisenbeiss	
Music Alex Baranowski		
Sound Recordist Rob Saunders		

Photographer Don McCullin reminisces about a career spent documenting the world's most notorious trouble spots. After his pictures of *Teddy Boys* and *Cold War* stand-offs in Berlin established his reputation, he was sent by the *Observer* and, from 1966, the *Sunday Times* to cover such conflicts as Cyprus (1964), the Congo (1965), Vietnam (1968-72), Biafra (1969), Northern Ireland (1971) and Lebanon (1976/82), as well as social deprivation in his native London. His former *Sunday Times* editor Sir Harold Evans talks about the impact of McCullin's work, the challenges of presenting it in advertising-driven colour supplements, and the change of emphasis when Rupert Murdoch took over the paper.

Mental

Australia/USA 2012
Director: P J Hogan
Certificate 15 115m 44s



Caught in a Trapp: Toni Collette

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

P.J. Hogan's best-known films are screwball anti-romantic comedies, reversing Anita Loos's famous proposition: in Hogan's world, gentlemen prefer blondes, such as Cameron Diaz's dippy, doe-eyed bride in *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), and they marry them too. *Mental*'s Shirley Moochmore is what happens after they supposedly live happily.

Fair-haired, pretty, eager-to-please Shirley married Barry after he raped her on their second date and she got pregnant. Mother to five variously disturbed daughters, she is raising them practically single-handedly while Barry, whose father thought of his family as the Kennedys, philanders his way through his mayoral re-election campaign. Shirley retreats to a fantasy world in which she is not a mother,

but a nanny, like the equally hapless Maria in *The Sound of Music*, belting out songs from that film.

Her out-loud vocal performances bring exquisite, suburban shame to her family. Dolphin Heads is a knowing part of the candy-coloured continuum of stylised suburbia that runs from Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* to *Weeds*; but Hogan also nods to the work of Jane Campion, whose films *Sweetie* (1989) and *Holy Smoke* (1999) similarly make discomfiting black comedy from the stereotypes of Australian suburbia. As Campion does in *Holy Smoke*, Hogan ropes in an American actor as the alpha male: Liev Schreiber, as shark-hunter Trev Blundell, shades his character subtly from honourable hero (with a dark past) to a broken man as hamstrung by trauma as the rest of the characters. But Trev is written and played

pretty straight; Rebecca Gibney, as Shirley, Caroline Goodall as her sister Doris, Kerry Fox as her tightly wound neighbour Nancy, and especially Toni Collette as the Moochmoores' new nanny and anti-Maria, Shaz, all have the opportunity to play at extremes. Hogan makes the point, underlined by Shaz's application of DSM-IV to all the Moochmoores' neighbours, that what looks like sanity is merely conformity.

But the film also shows that Shaz's non-conformity risks lives, while Prozac, Clozapine and ECT offer easy readjustment, substituting Shaz's full-on Laingianism for a world where there's scope for different expressions, particularly expressions of femininity. The surprising dispatch of Trev, the Great White Hero (and his Great White shark), in connection to Shaz's theory of the prevalence of insanity in Australia – it's because the continent was used as a lunatic asylum by the British – implies that it's the trauma of settler colonialism that has riven white Australian psyches. Proudly Aboriginal and lesbian Sandra, whom we first meet in the psychiatric unit where Shirley is being treated, is the most loveable and least problematic character in the film.

So *Mental* is often also mental in the sense of intelligent: filmmaking that's aware of its references to stranger-in-the-house films such as *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932). It has a Buñuelian cruelty at times, rather than a Burtonian sentimentality, although its use of *The Sound of Music* appears to suggest otherwise. If the Moochmoores are the von Trapps, with Shaz and Shirl sharing the role of Maria, then the film raises the disquieting question of who the Nazis might be. Nancy's racism towards Sandra, and the cruel conformism of the other suburbanites we meet, suggest it's uptight white Australians in general. The hills of New South Wales are vividly alive with the sound of Hogan's wild music in *Mental*, but they also echo with this disturbing and unresolved parallel. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Janet Zucker
Jerry Zucker
Todd Fellman
Jocelyn Moorhouse
Written by
P J Hogan
Director of Photography
Donald M McAlpine
Editor
Jill Bilcock
Production Designer
Graham 'Grace' Walker
Music
Michael Yezeriski
Sound Recordist
Craig Walmsley
Costume Designer
Tim Chappel

Screen Queensland
and Screen NSW
Zucker Productions
and Story
Bridge Films
With support from
Gold Coast City
Council's Economic
Development Branch
Financed in
association with
Screen NSW and its
Regional Filming Fund
Executive Producers
Gary Hamilton
Bryce Menzies
Lee Soon Kie

Cast
Toni Collette
Shaz
Liev Schreiber
Trevor
Anthony Lapaglia
Barry
Rebecca Gibney
Shirley
Kerry Fox
Nancy

Caroline Goodall
Doris
Deborah Milman
Sandra
Lily Sullivan
Coral
Sam Clark
Trout
Hayley Magnus
Donna
Malorie O'Neill
Michelle
Nicole Freeman
Leanne
Chelsea Bennett
Kayleen
Bethany Whitmore
Jane

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

10,416 ft +0 frames

Dolphin Heads, Australia, the present. Shirley Moochmore has retreated into a fantasy world and – much to the distress of her five daughters (self-diagnosed with various psychiatric disorders) and her uptight neighbour Nancy – has taken to singing songs from 'The Sound of Music'. Tea with her perfectionist sister Doris leads to a breakdown, after which her often-absent husband Barry, town mayor, has her committed to a psychiatric unit. Barry can't manage his daughters, so he hires Shaz, a hitchhiker with a pitbull, as their nanny. Shaz encourages the girls and Shirley to embrace their non-conformity; she engineers a series of humiliations on the townsfolk, including the bullying Barry, and matchmakes for her Aboriginal friend Sandra and racist Nancy's daughter Donna. Shirley's eldest daughter Coral discovers that her boss, shark-hunter Trevor Blundell, is Shaz's ex-husband. Shaz enlists the girls' help to steal Trev's prize stuffed shark (the same shark that caused the death of their daughter). Shaz is then herself committed to an institution. Shirley, now released, conceives a plan to free her. The plan results in Trev's accidental death. Shirley leaves the philandering Barry but supports his re-election campaign on her own terms.

Midnight's Children

Canada/United Kingdom/USA 2011

Director: Deepa Mehta

Certificate 12A 145m 45s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, in his collection of conversations with Umberto Eco *This Is Not the End of the Book*, muses on how a film adaptation can seriously impair and overtake our memory of its source. Yet fidelity to the original work is not without its dangers either, as proven by this handsome, stiff and overly reverential rendering of Salman Rushdie's classic allegorical fantasy of post-colonial India's tumultuous early years. Bowed under the weight of its prestigious parent text, the screenplay (written by executive producer Rushdie, who also narrates the wry, reflective voiceover) presses the film resolutely into the book's template rather than developing its own. As a result, the screen version feels cramped, leaden-footed and literal, where his extraordinary novel is sprawling, playful and gloriously protean.

With the 60-year, 600-page span of the book pared down to a single story, its wandering trajectory, from Dr Aziz's curious courtship to his grandson Saleem's ordeal as a hapless tool of Indian history, feels unfocused and overlong. As with Dickens's novels, the ebullient narrative fecundity of *Midnight's Children* might have been better served by a TV series where it could have had full rein. Here, the film's determinedly episodic nature militates against deep characterisation or motivation, rattling through parental affairs and Partition, snapshots of Indo-Pakistan wars and cross-border



Fantastic voyage: Satya Bhabha, Shriya Saran

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

David Hamilton

Screenplay

Salman Rushdie

From his book

Director of

Photography

Giles Nuttgens

Film Editor

Colin Monie

Production Designer

Dilip Mehta

Music Composed by

Nitin Sawhney

Sound Recordist

Sylvain Arseneault

Costume Designer

Dolly Ahluwalia

Visual Effects

Zoic Studios

Incessant Rain

Studios

©Hamilton Mehta

Midnight Productions

Inc. / Number 9 Films

(Midnight) Limited

Production Companies

FilmNation

Entertainment

and Noble Nomad

Pictures present a

David Hamilton/

Number 9 Films

production

A Deepa Mehta film

Produced by

Hamilton-

Mehta Midnight

Productions Inc.

In association

with Number 9

Midnight Films

Produced with the

Participation of

Telefilm Canada,

Noble Nomad

Pictures Ltd

Produced in

association with

The Canadian

Broadcasting

Corporation and

Movie Central - a

Corus Entertainment

Company

Produced with

the participation

of Canada Media

Fund, The Ontario

Media Development

Corporation

In association

with FilmNation

Entertainment US,

Blue Lake Media

Fund, Echo Lake

Entertainment

Executive Producers

Dilip Mehta

Salman Rushdie

David Hamilton

Deepa Mehta

Doug Mankoff

Andrew Spaulding

Steven Silver

Neil Tabatznik

Cast

Satya Bhabha

Saleem Sinai

Shahana Goswami

Amina Sinai nee

Mumtaz Aziz

Rajat Kapoor

Aadam Aziz

Seema Biswas

Mary Pereira

Shriya Saran

Parvati

Siddharth

Shiva

Ronit Roy

Ahmed Sinai

Rahul Bose

Zulfikar

Darsheel Safary

young Saleem Sinai

Kulbushan

Kharbada

Picture Singh

Soha Ali Khan

Jamila Sinai

Anita Majumdar

Emerald Aziz

Zaib Shaikh

Nadir Khan

Anshikaa

Shrivastava

young Jamila Sinai

Purav Bhandare

young Shiva

Samrat Chakrabarti

Wee Willie Winkle

Rakhi Kumari

Vanita

Dibyendu

Bhattacharyya

Deshmukh

Harish Khanna

Joseph D'Costa

Shabana Azmi

Naseem Ghani

Charles Dance

William Methwold

Ranvir Shorey

Laurel

Vinay Pathak

Vinay

Anupam Kher

Ghani

narrator

Salman Rushdie

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

El Films

13.117ft +8 frames

Kashmir, 1917. Dr Aziz marries his patient Naseem, after a courtship conducted via a hole in a sheet. In Agra in 1942, he and his family hide political refugee Nadir, who secretly marries and divorces their daughter Mumtaz before escaping. She moves to Bombay with new husband Ahmed Sinai. Their son is born at midnight on 15 August 1947 – the exact moment when Indian independence is granted. Nurse Mary impetuously swaps him with a street-singer's son, then becomes nanny for the Sinais, who name the boy Saleem. Saleem can summon the other magical 'Midnight Children' of India in his head, including Shiva, the Sinais' biological son. When his non-Sinai blood type is discovered, Saleem is sent to Pakistan, where his uncle General Zulfikar mounts a coup. Saleem's family joins him, and Mary confesses to the swap. The 1965 Indo-Pakistan War sets off a quarrel among the Midnight Children. After a nasal operation,

Saleem loses the ability to contact them. His family is killed in an air raid, which also puts him to sleep for six years. Sent to the 1971 East Pakistan War, he re-encounters Parvati-the-witch, another of the Midnight Children. She smuggles him to India in her 'basket of invisibility'. When an affair between them falters, she falls pregnant by Shiva. Saleem marries her, taking on baby Aadam. A state of emergency is declared. Parvati is killed when her slum is bulldozed. Saleem is imprisoned and tortured by Shiva, now a highly successful Indian soldier. Saleem tells Shiva that they were swapped as babies. He also reveals the whereabouts of the Midnight Children, and they are imprisoned. Released after the government falls unexpectedly, Saleem finds Aadam alive but mute, in the slum. Shiva is killed in a traffic accident. Saleem is happily reunited with Mary at her Bombay pickle factory, where Aadam finally starts to speak.

wanderings. Your attention snags momentarily on performance gems such as Seema Biswas's guilt-sodden baby-swapper Nurse Mary, Ronit Roy's simmeringly angry father, or Rahul Bose's subtly preening General Zulfikar – and then the caravan of Saleem's life and times lumbers on. Satya Bhabha's sensitive portrayal of the teenage-to-adult Saleem finally fleshes out our hero in the 1960s, but it's a long wait.

Director Deepa Mehta, whose powerful 'Elements' trilogy also examined Partition and Indian social and religious issues, seems similarly in thrall to the narrative's exigencies. Landed with a story sluggish with whimsical family history early on and breathless with political portent later, she struggles to infuse the characters' relationships with her usual emotional intensity, though she does bring a welcome lightness of touch to the ill-fated extramarital romance of Saleem's love-starved mother, an accretion of tiny gestures making it resonant with longing. Delicacy is absent, however, from the clunking magical realism that reduces the diverse superpowered multitude of 'Midnight Children' to a roomful of quarrelsome soft-focus wraiths. In this fine-looking film, which blends archive footage and tumultuous street scenes effectively to suggest social and political uproar, there's plenty of show, but far too much tell. Rushdie's narration and dialogue direct our attention ceaselessly, not trusting us to pick up on the full range of themes unaided. How one wishes Rushdie had relinquished this project to a writer who could have reimaged it on screen, and a director who might have conjured cinematic images as potent and fantastical as those he produced in prose.

Neil Young Journeys

USA 2011

Director: Jonathan Demme



Grizzly man: Neil Young

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

"There is a town in north Ontario/With dream comfort memory to spare/And in my mind/I still need a place to go/All my changes were there." Neil Young's plaintive 1970 paean 'Helpless' resounds over the end credits of Jonathan Demme's third document of the singer at work in the past six years, following 2006's *Neil Young: Heart of Gold* and 2009's *Neil Young Trunk Show*. Hard to encapsulate this untrammelled buffalo of an artist, but if the former two films encompass his most visited and treasured musical incarnations – the husky country-folk balladeer and the Crazy Horse-charged 'godfather of grunge' – then the new movie, like the album (*Le Noise*) and tour ('*Twisted Road*') it showcases, reminds us that Young can also be quite the one-man band, a roving troubadour of power, versatility and – to understate matters considerably – electricity. (Young and Demme, of course, have further history, dating back to the title track of 1993's *Philadelphia* and 1994's *Crazy Horse* binge-jam *The Complex Sessions*.)

Young's two closing '*Twisted Road*' dates at Toronto's Massey Hall in May 2011 marked something of a homecoming, this being both his home city and the site of the famous 1971 concert that unveiled songs destined for *Harvest* and the pop spotlights. When Demme discovered that Omemee, the town where Young grew up, was just a couple of hours up the road, he and DP Declan Quinn thumbed a ride in Young's luxuriant 1956 Crown Victoria and shot the big man mooching with his brother Bob around his old haunts, many of them gone (like old friends and family – but not really: "You keep them in your memory").

The film hits the ruminative, reflective notes of much of the concert playlist ('Peaceful Valley Boulevard', 'Love and War', 'Hitchhiker'), both the disclosures and shooting style informal to the point of making Jim Jarmusch's back-of-the-tour-bus breeze-shooting with Young in 1997's *Year of the Horse* look like a high-wire performance. Young admires the measure of Bob's driving further up the road ("Not too fast, not too slow") and growls a line about how he now does all his music listening in the car, but there's no talk of his forward-looking entrepreneurial endeavours, the LincVolt Electro-Cruiser (subject of his *Fork in the Road* album) or his Pono hi-res music campaign. By contrast, memorial songs are underscored with superimposed stills and footage – of the four students shot dead at Kent

State University in 1970 for 'Ohio', and of Young's late friend L.A. Johnson for 'You Never Call'.

Edited non-chronologically, the film alternates gig and road footage, with Young pulling his magnificent rust bucket off the freeway and sniffing out the old Massey Hall in the latter half of the film. (The elliptical editing "brings a little bit of Alain Resnais into the music film world", Demme told the *Collider* website.) There's little sense, aurally or visually, of an audience at the venue, the cameras holding long and poring tight over Young and his instruments, as the singer, prowling the stage in an old white linen jacket and beat-up straw hat, digs deep into himself. There's more to the movie than meets the eye, but those who hesitate before the general DIY aesthetic and superficial air of slowness should be forewarned of not one but two songs filmed entirely from a camera – a Beardcam? – affixed to Young's microphone, which largely documents his teeth and stubble. (Admittedly, the second instance is lent the soft-focus Vaseline treatment by a glob of spit on the lens.)

What meets the ear, though, is incontrovertibly theatrical: Young insisted on recording the movie in (very) high-res 192kHz sound – twice the current movie standard and more than four times that of CDs – and if you'll be hard-pressed to hear it at that resolution, the movie certainly growls, squalls and rumbles like it's alive. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jonathan Demme
Elliot Rabinowitz
Director of Photography
Declan Quinn
Edited by
Glenn Allen
Concert Mix
Tim Mulligan
Dave Lohr
Movie Mix
Paul Urmson

Production Companies
A Shake Pictures/
Clinica Estetico
production
In association with
SalesForce Films
A Jonathan
Demme Picture
Executive Producers
Marc Benioff
Bernard Shakey

[i.e. Neil Young]

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour**
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

A concert documentary/road movie in which numbers from Neil Young's two dates at Toronto's Massey Hall in May 2011 are intercut with footage of an amble around his childhood home in the Ontario town of Omemee and his drive from there to the venue in a 1956 Crown Victoria. The song list mixes tracks from Young's 2010 album *Le Noise* with evergreen favourites and two unreleased numbers, 'Leila' and 'You Never Call'; some songs are superimposed with snatches of related imagery.

The Oranges

USA 2012

Director: Julian Farino

Certificate 15 90m 25s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

It may have the trappings of a romantic comedy (a montage of blissful beach-gambolling is apparently obligatory, even for an 'age-gap relationship'), but the real concern of *The Oranges* is a soured romance between two suburban families. Notionally about the taboo-busting relationship that springs up between bored, fiftyish David and his best friend's flaky 24-year-old daughter Nina, it's less interested in the couple than in the comic chain reaction their coupling sets off.

Ignoring the queasy farce that *Blame It on Rio* (1984) confected from the same inflammatory situation, or the highly strung melodrama of *Damage* (1992), the film has a wry, observational tone, set by the deadpan voiceover of David's daughter Vanessa (the excellently exasperated Alia Shawkat). Like a vanilla version of *American Beauty*'s dark musings on suburban longings, her fond sniping at the neighbourly affection between the Ostroffs and the Wallings milks the barbecues and male bonding for laughs, but plays up how close neighbours become extended family over the years. She and Nina, still tied to their families emotionally and financially in their mid-twenties, are poster girls for extended adolescence. No wonder Nina's playful seduction of the bemused David (Leighton Meester at her most kittenish) looks more like teenage acting-out than ardour.

Worse still, there's a quite astonishing lack of chemistry between the lovers – kissing Nina for the first time, Hugh Laurie's David has the sheepish look of a man for whom shame, rather than sap, is rising. Scriptwriters Ian Helfer and Jay Reiss are so keen to point up the ambivalence in the relationship (David is rebounding from a stalled marriage, Nina from a broken engagement) that it simply fails to convince as a romance.

Where the film does score, however, is when its high-quality ensemble cast react to the crisis. As Nina's mother Cathy, Allison Janney wrings the biggest laughs from the film's slivers of farce – vomiting into a hedge with shock at discovering the couple, or warning her daughter that "David's balls are older than you are." Oliver Platt's Terry, a man pining for his lost best friend as well as for his daughter and unable to land the punch the situation demands, is a small delight. Catherine Keener nimbly underplays her handful of revenge gags as the wronged wife, even if her final massacre of both families' garish Christmas lawn decorations feels like the kind of easy laugh you'd get from a mainstream 'holiday' comedy.

Director Julian Farino, schooled in hit HBO shows such as *Entourage* and *Big Love*, steers the film deftly to show off its well-pitched performances and frequently witty dialogue. But for a project that was feted in 2008 on Hollywood's 'Black List' of the best unmade film scripts, it still feels like a high-end TV miniseries, full of zingers, reaction shots and dysfunctional family gags. A dramedy that errs on the side of comedy, it is perceptive, even sympathetic about the messiness of life, and sidesteps the mushiness or moral payback most mainstream films feel honour-bound to flourish. In places it feels almost French in its shrugging acceptance

Quartet

United Kingdom/Germany 2012
Director: Dustin Hoffman
Certificate 12 98m 12s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

A screen adaptation of Ronald Harwood's gentle 1999 stage comedy about a home for old opera singers doesn't seem an obvious choice for Dustin Hoffman's directing debut. But as a septuagenarian veteran of nearly 60 movies, he couldn't be better qualified to explore the film's central theme – the challenges that confront the ageing artist.

Jean Horton, the famous diva who must be persuaded to join with two former colleagues and her ex-husband Reggie to sing the quartet from *Rigoletto* in a vital fundraising concert to save their retirement home, is the fierce guardian of her own legend. Played by Maggie Smith in her haughty-but-vulnerable mode, Jean cloisters herself with her old recordings and stubbornly refuses to perform because "I can't insult the memory of who I was." Harwood's narrative, however, prefers that the pull of friendship and duty trumps that of art and nostalgia via an eventual exasperated ultimatum of "Just fucking *do it*" delivered by tetchy fellow quartet member Wilf (Billy Connolly).

Quartet, with its emphasis on seizing life while it can still be lived, is the pragmatic, light-hearted antithesis of Terrence McNally's 1995 play *Master Class*, which was obsessed by memory and the sacrifices that the ageing Maria Callas had made for art. In this instance, late love and rediscovered friendships provide the sweet side of the film's bittersweet look at the ravages of time on vocal talent. The irony is that the film shows off, with elegance if not with great originality, what older actors can continue to achieve, since their expressive instruments, unlike a singer's voice, stay intact.

Harwood was inspired to write *Quartet* after seeing *Tosca's Kiss*, Daniel Schmid's 1984 documentary about retired opera singers living in the Casa Verdi in Milan. Yet since none of the central actors sings, nowhere in his script is there a moment to rival the documentary's high point, when octogenarians Sara Scuderi and Leonida Bellon re-enact Scarpia's murder from *Tosca*, their majestic, age-weathered voices bursting from stooped bodies. Instead, we get a trio rather



Silver singers: Connolly, Courtenay, Sachs, Collins

than a quartet of fine acting performances, Smith alternating her trademark withering sarcasm with notes of pathos, Tom Courtenay beautifully underplaying Reggie's journey from affront to forgiveness, and Pauline Collins giving Cissie's dementia a ditsy comic spin.

As with *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), another retirement-home comedy packed with veteran British talent and squarely aimed at the grey pound, the film's characterisation is largely one-note (Connolly isn't stretched as elderly roué Wilf, and Michael Gambon is frankly wasted as waspish concert director Cedric). The narrative is slight, utilising that hardy-perennial the-show-will-save-us plot that even *The Muppets* (2011) geyed as corny as Kansas. There's also a touch too much lingering on the lush English country-house setting, an unlikely, golden-toned Arcadia dotted with music-making OAPs. But Hoffman's slow pace and concentration on the performances pay comic and dramatic dividends – Smith, silencing the breakfast room with a Medea-worthy "Fuck you!" or pleading for forgiveness for a 50-year-old infidelity, makes her scenes reverberate as only a seasoned performer can. Though it pays a charming final tribute to every single one of its cast members by including photographs of them in their performing prime in the credits, *Quartet's* ultimate message seems to echo a wry line from *The Straight Story* (1999): "The worst part of being old is remembering when you were young." **S**



Love thy neighbour: 'The Oranges'

of human frailty. Too bad then that it brandishes the kind of we're-all-in-a-better-place narrative tidiness at its finish, the hipster version of happy-ever-after. Underneath the alternative wrappings, *The Oranges* is a film that wants to have its Christmas cake and eat it too. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Anthony Bregman
Leslie Urdang
Dean Vanech

Written by

Jay Reiss
Ian Helfer

Director of

Photography

Steven Fierberg

Editors

Jeffrey M. Werner
Carole Kravetz
Aykanian

Production

Designer

Dan Davis

Original Music

Klaus Badelt
Andrew Raiher

Sound

TBC

Costume Designer

David Robinson

Production

Companies

ATO Pictures
presents an Olympus

Pictures production

A Likely Story

production in

association

with FilmNation

Entertainment

Executive

Producers

Ian Helfer

Jay Reiss

Stefanie Azpiazu

Sam Hoffman

Dan Revers

Cast

Hugh Laurie

David Walling

Catherine Keener

Paige Walling

Oliver Platt

Terry Ostroff

Allison Janney

Cathy Ostroff

Alia Shawkat

Vanessa Walling

Adam Brody

Toby Walling

Leighton Meester

Nina Ostroff

Sam Rosen

Ethan

Aya Cash

Maya

Hoon Lee

Henry Chart

Tim Guinee

Roger

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

8,137 ft +8 frames

New Jersey, present day. After her fiancé Ethan cheats on her, 24-year-old Nina returns to her family home for Thanksgiving. Rebuffing her mother's attempts to pair her with the eligible Toby, she begins a secret affair with neighbour David, her father Terry's best friend and Toby's father. Both families are devastated when the affair is revealed, and Terry tries to land a punch on David. Paige, David's wife, leaves home, and devotes herself to an African farming charity. Nina moves into David's family home. Vanessa, Nina's friend and David's daughter, angrily shuns the couple. Terry and wife Cathy find their marriage oddly revitalised. Ethan turns up and tries to win Nina back. A saddened David placates Vanessa by offering to end the affair. Paige vents her rage by driving her car over the Christmas lawn decorations outside both family houses. In an emotional showdown, Paige admits that neither she nor David can return to the marriage. Nina and David break up. Nina sends Ethan away and decides to determine her own path. Vanessa finds a job and an apartment in New York. Paige starts a relationship with her boss at the charity. Terry and David resume their friendship.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Finola Dwyer
Stewart Mackinnon

Written by

Ronald Harwood
Based on his play

Director of

Photography

John De Borman

Editor

Barney Pilling

Production Designer

Andrew McAlpine

Music Supervisor

Kle Savidge

Sound Recordist

Martin Trevis

Costume Designer

Odile Dicks-Mireaux

Cast

Maggie Smith

Jean Horton

Tom Courtenay

Reggie Paget

Billy Connolly

Companies

BBC Films and
DCM Productions

present a Headline
Pictures and Finola

Dwyer Productions
production in

association

with Decca and

HanWay Films

Executive Producers

Dustin Hoffman

Dickon Stainer

Xavier Marchand

Jamie Laurenson

Dario Suter

Christoph Daniel

Marcc Schmidheiny

Wilf Bond

Pauline Collins

Cecily 'Cissie' Robson

Michael Gambon

Cedric Livingstone

Sheridan Smith

Dr Lucy Cogan

Andrew Sachs

Bobby Swanson

Dame Gwyneth

Jones

Anne Langley

Trevor Peacock

George

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Momentum Pictures

8,838 ft +0 frames

England, present day. Beecham House, a home for retired opera singers, is to close in six months' time because of a lack of funds. The arrival of world-famous soprano Jean Horton upsets resident Reggie, who is her long-estranged ex-husband. Reggie and fellow residents Cissie and Wilf try to persuade Jean to help them recreate their famous 'Rigoletto' quartet for the home's annual concert, to boost ticket revenue. Jean refuses angrily, furious that the trio's friendly overtures have had a hidden agenda. Dementia-sufferer Cissie has a fall after an argument with Jean, and her condition worsens. Jean confesses that she is scared of performing lest she betray her once great talent. Wilf, whose own illness is taking its toll, insists that she stop being selfish; she finally agrees. Ticket sales save the home from closure. Just before the concert begins, Jean discovers that Reggie has never stopped loving her. She suffers a bout of stage fright while watching another performer's aria. Cissie becomes badly confused, and tries to leave the building, but Jean talks her into performing. Reggie proposes to Jean and is accepted, and the quartet takes to the stage.

Rise of the Guardians

USA 2012
Director: Peter Ramsey
Certificate PG 97m 2s



Legends assemble: 'Rise of the Guardians'

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Rise of the Guardians, the latest computer-animated spectacle from the DreamWorks studio, is a film that many children will love for the same reasons that grown-ups may be less enthused. The story is a mix of *Peter Pan* and *Avengers Assemble*. Lonely magic boy Jack Frost (voiced by Chris Pine) is inducted into a hero team consisting of feisty, action-ready versions of Father Christmas, the Sandman, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny, all fighting a nightmare-making boogeyman bully voiced by Jude Law. The film's tone is set by its version of Saint Nick sporting 'naughty' and 'nice' tattoos on his muscled arms, while the Easter Bunny is a scowling six-foot Australian bruiser with Hugh Jackman's voice.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Christina Steinberg Nancy Bernstein	Sound Editor Richard King	North, Santa Claus Isla Fisher
Screenplay David Lindsay-Abaire Based on <i>Guardians of Childhood</i> the book series by William Joyce and <i>The Man in the Moon</i> directed by William Joyce	Head of Character Animation Gabe Hordos	Tooth, the Tooth Fairy Hugh Jackman
Editor Joyce Arrastia	Production Companies DreamWorks Animation SKG presents a PDI/DreamWorks Production	E. Aster Bunny, the Easter Bunny Jude Law
Production Designer Patrick Marc Hanenberger	Executive Producers William Joyce Guillermo Del Toro Michael Siegel	Pitch Black Dakota Goyo
Visual Consultant Roger Deakins	Voice Cast Chris Pine Jack Frost Alec Baldwin	Jamie Bennett
Music Alexandre Desplat		Dolby digital/DTS In Colour [1.85:1]
Sound Designer/Supervising		Some screenings presented in 3D
		Distributor Paramount Pictures UK
		8,733ft +0 frames

The present. Jack Frost is an ageless boy who delights in freezing the world in winter, but is frustrated that no ordinary people can see him. He's bundled off to the North Pole to meet the Guardians, protectors of children: Father Christmas, the Sandman, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny (who dislikes Jack). Jack is told that he must become a new Guardian and help defeat the malevolent Pitch, who aims to rule the world with his nightmares.

Pitch weakens the Guardians, apparently destroys the Sandman and tricks Jack, making him look like a traitor. However, Jack is inspired when he recovers the memory of his human family and childhood. Helped by an imaginative boy, Jamie, who can see him, Jack rallies the Guardians against Pitch, who's finally defeated by the restored Sandman and driven off by his own nightmares.

Directed by Peter Ramsey (moving up from a TV spinoff of *Monsters vs Aliens*), the film is dominated by whizzy, whirling spectacle that never really relents – there's always another giant fantasy landscape or flying battle over clouds or rooftops. Many adults may agree with the sentiments of Brad Bird, director of the Oscar-winning *The Incredibles* (2004), who criticised cartoon films' slide into "manic jabbering and quick cutting" in place of deep emotion. You'll look in vain for depth in *Rise of the Guardians*. The story is a mash-up of fantasy and comic-book tropes, and Jack's 'who am I?' journey was travelled better by the ursine hero of the DreamWorks *Kung Fu Panda* films.

Guardians is more convincing as a feast for the eyes, if you have a taste for epic CGI worlds full of flying toys, critter armies and terrible heights and depths. The critters are the best, especially Father Christmas's regiments of grumpy yetis and gibbering elves (though the latter feel very like the show-stealing minions in 2010's *Despicable Me*). The invention here is undeniable – there's a visit to the Easter Bunny's lush domain of walking eggs, framed through the eyes of a delighted little girl, while the Sandman is a mute, shy Yoda, conjuring up golden dolphins and brontosaurus from fairy dust.

Jude Law makes a silver-tongued, shadow-loving villain, broadly recalling Tom Hiddleston's Loki in recent Marvel superhero films, though the script could have gone deeper with his affinity with Jack – both hero and villain are outcasts, desperate to be visible to the world. Law's villain is no more silly or childish than many adversaries in superhero films; however, the script doesn't have that genre's teen-friendly sass, and the fairytale premise may limit the audience. Only one of the five heroes is female (Isla Fisher's fluttering Tooth Fairy), and she's not much more interesting than the token females in many fantasy battle teams. It's a shame, given that DreamWorks has produced increasingly interesting heroines in its recent animated films, well ahead of Pixar's *Brave*.

DreamWorks Animation recently announced that it will step up production to three CGI cinema films a year; 12 upcoming titles have been announced into 2016. If they're all as accomplished as *Guardians* or better, it will be a tremendous achievement. Yet will even such spectacle be enough to draw back audiences again and again? ☹

Safety Not Guaranteed

USA 2012
Director: Colin Trevorrow

Reviewed by Carmen Gray

A real-life classifieds wanted ad for a time-travel partner that became an online meme was the inspiration for Colin Trevorrow's directing debut *Safety Not Guaranteed*. It's the kind of quirky internet-age scenario you'd expect to chime with the mumblecore set, and with Mark Duplass on board as co-producer and star it bears the small-budget, lo-fi hipster shadings of earlier Duplass films such as 2005's *The Puffy Chair*. Initially it seems as if we're in for a paint-by-numbers American indie black-sheep romcom, as familiar stereotypes are introduced. Deadpan, morosely pessimistic Darius (Aubrey Plaza), who likens her experience of high school to that of a mouse in a snake cage, has just graduated. She's interning for a Seattle magazine, changing toilet rolls and doing other menial tasks for a boss whose modus operandi is withering putdowns. When obnoxious reporter Jeff (Jake Johnson) proposes travelling to the seaside town of Ocean View to track down an oddball who's advertising for someone to accompany him back in time ("Must bring your own weapons. Safety not guaranteed. I have only done this once before"), Darius volunteers to join him. Completing the trio on the trip is fellow intern Arnau (Karan Soni), a sciences major and bespectacled gamer toting a flame-stickered laptop.

Slight though the film is, it's not long before it wins us over. This is in no small part due to Plaza (from television's *Parks and Recreation*), who is a revelation in her first major film role. Duplass, meanwhile, manages a tricky balance of screwy unpredictability and emotional sincerity as loner supermarket clerk and would-be time-traveller Ken. When Darius poses as a candidate for Ken's scheme, embracing his loopy plans, shooting handguns in the woods and acting as accomplice on a laser-stealing mission, real chemistry bubbles over. The inevitable romance is disarmingly sweet, and sequences that in other hands would be cringe-worthy (a serenade by zither, for instance) charm.

Trying too hard to be quirky has been the death-knell of many an indie comedy, but the film avoids this through its laidback casualness, while a smartly funny script keeps it crackling along. But its real secret weapon is the genuine heart underlying its humour. Youth's impermanence and regret for the past are



Past caring: Aubrey Plaza, Mark Duplass

Seven Psychopaths

United Kingdom/USA 2012
Director: Martin McDonagh
Certificate 15 110m 16s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

If you're a screenwriter struggling with a creative block, does it actually get you out of a hole to start penning a script about a screenwriter with a creative block? Martin McDonagh's work for stage and screen thrives on teasing out such jesting conundrums, and here he sets up Colin Farrell as a boozy Irish screenwriter in LA struggling with a new project he knows will be called 'Seven Psychopaths' – except he's only got one psycho in mind thus far, a determined Vietnamese seeking vengeance for the My Lai massacre on the nation whose soldiers committed the atrocities. Where next? Farrell has a notion about writing a 'Buddhist' action movie that will deliver a non-violent message, but is that really tenable, or is he just fooling himself? After all, if he's stuck for material, he only has to look around the City of Angels, where a masked killer is wiping out Mafia underlings and leaving a Jack of Diamonds card at the scene of the slaughter.

All this looks as if we're being set up to ponder the role of the writer trying to stay true to himself while juggling commercial considerations and the simple fact of being surrounded by insane real-life carnage on a daily basis. McDonagh is content to float the idea and then potter his way through an extended shaggy-dog story, taking in a series of darkly comic tall tales that may or may not be based in fact, plus notional character sketches and scene ideas for Farrell's great work-in-progress. Stuck for material, Farrell (and presumably, by extension, McDonagh) will grab at ideas anywhere he can find them.

Shades of Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2002) here, though the constituent parts could hardly be more different, as we mosey through a landscape of trigger-happy, post-Tarantino Angeleno gangsters and hustlers who are never short of a zippy one-liner. Farrell gives the whole malarkey some ballast as the likeable bumbling scribe, but the film is pretty much a showcase for a wish-list of the coolest Hollywood character



Canine able: Christopher Walken

performers. Sam Rockwell (the runty best pal) runs the gamut from seemingly hapless loser to unhinged headcase determined to bow out in a blaze of bullet-riddled glory, while Christopher Walken brings his very particular spacey gravitas to the role of scheming dognapper, devoted husband and man with a psychopathic past. What with Tom Waits as a remorseful crazy who spent his younger days as a serial killer of serial killers (or as he describes it, "going around the country killing people going around the country killing people"), and Harry Dean Stanton effective in a small role as a father pursuing his daughter's murderer to the very gates of hell, the hip quotient here is certainly considerable, and McDonagh of course has the writing skills to get good value out of all his distinguished collaborators.



running themes. Time-travel here isn't conceived as a grandiose, species-saving spectacle, or even as a way to become a better person à la *Groundhog Day* (1993), but merely a low-key device dramatising touchingly human, selfish yearnings. While Darius and Ken both wish that they could have prevented the deaths of loved ones, these backstories are thinly sketched, and it's Jeff whose obsession with the past (his real motive for the trip is to look up an old flame) unexpectedly acquires the most pathos. At first disillusioned that the former stunner has gained some pounds, his character steps beyond caricature when fantasy gives way to real emotional connection, igniting his vulnerability.

The title finally nods to the precarious nature of life and the importance of embracing emotional risk, the made-in-the-garage DIY modesty of Ken's time-machine making it all the more effective as a symbol of defiance against cynical limits. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Marc Turtletaub Peter Saraf Stephanie Langhoff Derek Connolly Colin Trevorrow	Beach and Duplass Brothers production Executive Producers Mark Duplass Jay Duplass John Hodges Michael B. Clark	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Derek Connolly		Distributor Vertigo Films
Director of Photography Benjamin Kasulke	Cast Aubrey Plaza Darius Britt Mark Duplass Ken Calloway Jake Johnson Jeff Schwensen Karan Soni Arnau Jenica Bergere Liz Kristen Bell Belinda Jeff Garlin Mr Britt Mary Lynn Rajsuk Bridget	
Edited by Franklin Peterson Joe Landauer		
Production Designer Ben Blankenship		
Music Ryan Miller		
Costume Designer Rebecca Luke		
Production Companies Filmdistrict presents in association with Big Beach a Big		

US, present-day. Magazine interns Darius and Arnau travel from Seattle with reporter Jeff to research a story in the seaside town of Ocean View: they aim to find and profile a man (grocery-store clerk Ken) who placed a classified ad seeking a time-travel partner. Darius gets close to Ken by posing as a candidate. Ken starts her on training exercises, evaluating her suitability. Pressed for her mission's reason, she confides in him about the guilt she feels over her mother's death. Ken says that he wants to prevent his former girlfriend Belinda being killed in a 2001 car accident. Darius helps Ken steal some lasers. Jeff tracks down his high-school crush Liz – his real reason for visiting Ocean View. Though he's initially disheartened that Liz's looks have deteriorated, they re-establish a connection. After Liz rejects Jeff's invitation to return to Seattle with him, he takes Arnau on a drunken night out, encouraging him to make a move on a young woman and not waste his youth. Having learnt that Belinda is alive, Darius interviews her. Belinda contradicts Ken's story. Darius discovers that Ken's fear of government forces is not merely paranoia – agents really are following him. Darius confronts Ken about Belinda. Ken says that if she is now alive, his time-travelling worked. Apologising for lying, Darius joins Ken on his boat in the woods. He tells her that his mission has changed: he now wants to go back for her. He activates the time-machine. As the others look on, they disappear.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Graham Broadbent Pete Czernin Martin McDonagh	production A Martin McDonagh film	Linda Bright Clay Myra
Written by Martin McDonagh	Executive Producers Tessa Ross	Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Ben Davis	Cast Colin Farrell Marty Sam Rockwell Billy Woody Harrelson Charlie Christopher Walken Hans Tom Waits Zachariah Abbie Cornish Kaya Olga Kurylenko Angela, 'Angie' Zeljko Ivanek Paulo Gabourey Sidibe Sharice Harry Dean Stanton man in hat Amanda Warren Maggie	Distributor Momentum Pictures
Editor Lisa Gunning		9,924 ft +0 frames
Production Designer David Wasco		
Music by/Score Orchestrated and Conducted by Carter Burwell		
Sound Geoffrey Patterson		
Costume Designer Karen Patch		
Production Companies CBS Films, Film4 and BFI present a Blueprint Pictures		

Present-day Los Angeles. Marty, an Irish screenwriter with a drink problem, is struggling to find inspiration for a new project entitled 'Seven Psychopaths'. His friend Billy, a sometime actor who now runs a dognapping scam with elderly cohort Hans, regales Marty with urban legends, and even places a newspaper advertisement calling for psychopaths to come forward. Billy and Marty unwittingly kidnap a Shih Tzu belonging to genuinely psychopathic mobster Charlie, whose henchmen track down Hans and Marty, only to be murdered by a masked serial killer who leaves a Jack of Diamonds card at each slaying. Meanwhile a man named Zachariah answers Billy's ad and tells Marty how he and accomplice Maggie roamed the country killing serial killers. Charlie murders Hans's wife Myra, in hospital for cancer treatment. A shocked Billy kills Charlie's girlfriend Angie, with whom he's been having an affair, not realising that she was the Jack of Diamonds killer. Billy, Hans and Marty hatch a plan to take the dog into the desert and lure Charlie to a standoff, imagining it as a suitable climax for Marty's developing movie script. Troubled by the loss of his wife, Hans decides to leave but is shot by Charlie's sidekick. Determined to go down fighting, Billy engineers a shootout with Charlie in which they're both killed. Marty uses the material in his 'Seven Psychopaths' script.

As the proceedings ping from outré slaying to celluloid-savvy musing, blood-soaked fantasy to dark urban legend, the movie is as bright and lively as a pinball machine. In the meantime, the dognapping conceit that will bring Farrell (via scam artists Rockwell and Walken) into life-threatening contact with Woody Harrelson's overwound mobster, incandescent at the loss of his beloved Shih Tzu, provides just about enough forward momentum to keep the story alive and heading for a traditional desert showdown. It has to be said, though, that McDonagh is taking a lot on in trying to construct a generic innocents-tangle-with-genuine-bad-guys crime-movie plot at the same time as deconstructing the manners and mores which traditionally make up such Hollywood staples – comments about Farrell's female characters being underdeveloped to a fault, for instance, play against the largely decorative/victim roles with which his actresses are landed here. Partly it's that the ongoing meta-commentary takes up screen time and leaves the actual story foundation looking slightly skimpy, but there's also the issue that tantalising us about whether we're watching the film made from Farrell's completed script or seeing the accumulation of thought processes and out-of-control events going into the writing of it ultimately leaves everything in a state of indeterminacy. Intentional, one assumes, yet the effect is to drain the film of any kind of moral or emotional substance, even if it's undeniably diverting from moment to moment.

Perhaps that's why *Seven Psychopaths* feels less satisfying overall than McDonagh's *In Bruges* (2008), where the fugitive Irish crooks' laugh-out-loud dialogue still allowed for some degree of purchase on the world of genuine moral conflict and choice. If anything, the screenplay here sees some overlap with areas explored in McDonagh's previous stage work: 2003's National Theatre production *The Pillowman* looked at the relationship between a writer's dark imagination and the horrors unfolding in the world around him, while in *A Behanding in Spokane* – a 2010 Broadway sell-out starring Messrs Walken and Rockwell – the stuff of urban legend bled over into a black comedy of manners. There's something essentially slippery about these two plays that has carried over into *Seven Psychopaths*, a sense that McDonagh is toying with the audience as to how seriously we might take these snaking, crazy stories about stories. That goes too for this new film, similarly elusive even as it betrays an intoxication with Hollywood populism as sincere as anything in Tarantino. On a formal level it's much more ambitious and achieved than the nuts-and-bolts assemblage of *In Bruges*, yet eventually it runs up against a familiar problem: how do you play around with the form without diluting its appeal and pleasure?

On this evidence, a screenwriter can get himself out of a hole by writing about a blocked screenwriter getting himself out of a hole, but it's a trick he's only going to be able to pull off once. Next time out, McDonagh may not be able to hide behind a self-reflexive fantail, and that will be the real test of his cinematic mettle. **S**

Silent Hill Revelation

Canada/France 2012
Director: Michael J. Bassett
Certificate 15 94m 22s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Cognoscenti rate Konami's *Silent Hill* 'survival horror' computer-games franchise as outstanding in its field, but the film spinoffs remain stubbornly disposable. *Silent Hill* (2006), directed by Christophe Gans, reproduced the game's misty look, which Michael Bassett, running for cover after the ambitious *Solomon Kane* (2009), does again in 3D here. Once again, the result is a film that looks wonderful but is utterly uninvolved, with talented players such as Malcolm McDowell, Deborah Kara Unger, Martin Donovan, Radha Mitchell and Carrie-Anne Moss solemnly trotting out exposition in monotone while the young lead characters are strangled by their convoluted yet stubbornly uninteresting backstories.

Given that the record of game-to-film adaptations has been dismal since *Super Mario Bros.* in 1993, it's becoming apparent that there's something inherent in the medium of computer games which actively hobbles movie versions. It may well be that games, by their nature, tend to be generic – evoking film forms without adding to them, since the worlds created are backdrops for play rather than scenery for story or character development. When they are adapted into actual films, the results are emotionless *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* duplicates of mid-level genre pictures, often with a specific debt to pay (the way the *Resident Evil* franchise is spun from George Romero's *Dead* films). The real secret master of *Silent Hill* seems to be Clive Barker, since the premise – and the design of the creatures and their environment – owes a great deal to his *Hellraiser* franchise, with a few elements of *Nightbreed* and *The Midnight Meat Train* thrown in; there has even been an official *Hellraiser* sequel with *Revelations* as a subtitle (*Children of the Corn: Revelation* and *The Butterfly Effect 3: Revelations* are also on the books). Chains clank, surgical S&M is the main fashion choice,



Uphill struggle: Adelaide Clemens

facial features are sewn shut, infernal labyrinths are wandered through and innocents are reborn as messiahs for races of subterranean creatures, but missing is Barker's actual sensibility.

There are impressive monsters, mostly held over from the game – a spidery conglomerate of blank-faced mannequins which incorporates borrowed severed heads – but the scenes in which they appear to menace the heroine (Adelaide Clemens, replacing Jodelle Ferland) or slaughter the guest stars fall flat because it's impossible to care either way about the outcome of these significant yet petty struggles. As in a game, they could pan out differently on the next play – and being killed (repeatedly) is no guarantee of exclusion from further instalments, just as survival is equally meaningless. At the finale, concluding a storyline drawn from the game *Silent Hill 3*, the heroine runs into Travis Grady (Peter Outerbridge), player-protagonist of the fifth game, *Silent Hill Origins*, en route to his own adventure in town. Considering the six-year gap between instalments, it seems the *Silent Hill* series won't be as prolific as producer Samuel Hadida's *Resident Evil* saga, but so far it has been just as pointless. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Samuel Hadida
Producer
Don Carmody
Written by
Michael J. Bassett
Adapted by
Laurent Hadida
Based on the game created by Konami
Director of Photography
Maxime Alexandre
Editor
Michele Conroy
Production Designer
Alicia Keywan
Music
Jeff Danna
Songs
Akira Yamaoka
Sound Mixer
John Thomson
Costume Designer
Wendy Partridge
Digital Visual Effects
Mr. X Inc.
Stunt Co-ordinator
Steve Lucescu

©Silent Hill 2
DCP Inc./Davis
Production SH2, Sarl

Production Companies
A Silent Hill 2
DCP Inc./Davis
Films production
in association with Konami
A Michael J. Bassett film
A Samuel Hadida presentation
Executive Producer
Victor Hadida
Film Extracts
Silent Hill (2006)

Cast
Adelaide Clemens
Sharon Da Silva/
Heather Mason/
Alessa
Kit Harrington
Vincent Carter
Deborah Kara Unger
Dahlia Gillespie
Martin Donovan
Douglas Cartland
Malcolm McDowell
Leonard Wolf
Carrie-Anne Moss
Claudia Wolf
Sean Bean
Harry Mason

Radha Mitchell
Rose Da Silva
Peter Outerbridge
Travis Grady

Dolby Digital/ DTS/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
3D

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

8,493 ft +0 frames

Teenager Sharon Da Silva and her adoptive father Harry move to a new town and take on new identities, as they have been doing ever since Harry rescued the girl from the cursed West Virginia town of Silent Hill, losing his wife Rose in the process. In her new school, Sharon meets Vincent, another transfer student, but rebuffs his offer of friendship, citing a policy of not getting close to people as she will soon leave. Private eye Douglas Cartland, who has tracked Sharon down, is murdered by a monster. Harry is kidnapped by the Order of Valtiel, a cult based in Silent Hill. The gateway to an infernal dimension, Silent Hill is populated by lost souls and monsters, and ruled by Alessa, a dark messiah who is a lookalike for Sharon. Sharon and Vincent join up and go to the haunted site to attempt to rescue Harry. It transpires that Vincent is one of the Order of Valtiel, charged with luring Sharon back to Silent Hill so that she can be ritually reincorporated into Alessa – Sharon is the evil creature's suppressed good side, manifested as a separate person. Sharon learns more about herself from Leonard Wolf, Vincent's imprisoned, insane grandfather, and unites her half of a mystic amulet with a segment Leonard has hidden inside himself, creating a powerful magic weapon. Sharon confronts Alessa and absorbs her, then has to battle Vincent's monstrous mother Claudia. Harry remains in Silent Hill to search for his wife, but Sharon and Vincent leave.

Smashed

USA 2012

Director: James Ponsoldt

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If the study of US film history is any indication, the decline in American exceptionalism has been directly connected to a decline in the nation's tolerance for strong waters. There was a time when Nick Charles could drain half a dozen martinis in a single sitting and walk away straight as a soldier, when John Wayne would ask the saloonkeeper to leave the bottle when he ordered his bourbon, neat – but for many years since, drinking and problem drinking have been as good as synonymous in American pictures.

Since the leftfield success of *Crazy Heart* in 2009, we have seen the same material played in drag in *Country Strong*, seen Adam Sherman's recent indie *Crazy Eyes* with its humblebrag autobiographical depiction of LA nightlife debauchery, watched Charlize Theron frowse herself down in *Young Adult* and Joaquin Phoenix's indelible Freddie Quell in Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master*. And now, released within weeks of Robert Zemeckis's *Flight* – which connects a spectacular crashlanding set-piece to a functional alcoholic's plight – comes James Ponsoldt's *Smashed*.

Concentrating on a more mundane case of self-salvage than the Zemeckis film, *Smashed* specifically examines the effects of alcoholism on a couple, Kate and Charlie, who are accustomed to finishing the dregs of every bottle strewn through their soiled house, more a pad than a home. Co-written with the Los Angeles comedienne Susan Burke, *Smashed* is director Ponsoldt's second feature after 2006's *Off the Black*, which was likewise centred on a character with a drinking problem.

Smashed stars 27-year-old Mary Elizabeth Winstead, looking to prove herself more than another pretty face by going on motormouthed crack-pipe jags and peeing on the floor of a convenience store. Committed to de-glamming, Winstead wears her hair in an unwashed where-did-you-sleep-last-night style and, tall and lank, acts the belligerent ragdoll when in her cups. Playing Kate's consistently unsober husband, *Breaking Bad*'s Aaron Paul is resourceful when manoeuvring himself into creatively



Couple retreats: Paul, Winstead

unflattering positions, foetally slouched in a mamasan chair or crawling over Kate, displaying a hint of butt cleavage. In fact, if there's a single aspect of boozing that *Smashed* gets across, it's quite how grotesque a partner can look when you haven't been matching your drinks.

If always well acted, the road to sobriety is not quite so vigorously handled. As Kate's vice-principal and gateway to AA, *Parks and Recreation*'s Nick Offerman adds a note of Tom Arnold-ish husky twitchiness, a furtive gnome behind a brushy goatee. The counterbalance to Offerman's off-putting presence is Kate's sponsor, played by *The Help*'s Octavia Spencer, who has the task of acting earnest mouthpiece of doctrinaire wisdom. "I hate slogans," Kate will tell her AA group, "I think they sound like bumper stickers" – but when it counts most, *Smashed* turns to commonplaces. Its cinematic decor – lens-flare Instagram pictorialism for instant nostalgia, warm here-comes-the-sunshine acoustic strumming of the kind you might hear on a commercial for some twiggly breakfast cereal to signify wellness – is so safe and familiar that it seems as if *Smashed* is following a time-tested, chartered 12-step programme of its own... straight to Sundance success. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jonathan Schwartz
Andrea Sperling
Jennifer Cochis
Written by
James Ponsoldt
Susan Burke
Director of Photography
Tobias Datum
Edited by
Suzanne Spangler
Production Designer
Linda Sena
Music
Eric D. Johnson
Andy Cabcic
Sound
TBC
Costume Designer
Diaz Jacobs
Production Companies
Super Crispy
Entertainment

presents a Jonathan Schwartz/Andrea Sperling production
In association with Front Porch Films
Executive Produced by
Audrey Wilf
Zygi Wilf

Cast
Mary Elizabeth Winstead
Kate Hannah
Aaron Paul
Charlie Hannah
Nick Offerman
Dave Davies
Megan Mullally
Principal Barnes
Kyle Gallner
Owen
Mackenzie Davis
Millie
Bree Turner

Freda
Mary Kay Place
Rochelle
Octavia Spencer
Jenny

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

Los Angeles, the present. A young married couple, Kate and Charlie, are both nightly blackout drinkers. Although Kate, a teacher, gets to work on time, she's sufficiently hungover to throw up in front of her class of first graders. Kate tells her students and principal that the cause is morning sickness, but then instinctively tells the truth to vice-principal Dave. After a weekend of heavy drinking, Kate returns to work, where Dave informs her that he is a recovering alcoholic. He puts Kate in touch with his AA group, where she meets her sponsor, Jenny, and begins living a sober life. This creates tensions between Kate and the feckless Charlie, whose family underwrites his hobby-career as a music journalist and pays for their house. Kate's new sense of responsibility forces her to confess the truth to her principal, which leads to her dismissal. Out of a job, Kate has a relapse and gets drunk, returning home to have a final bust-up with Charlie, who too late shows his support and concern.

A year later, Kate is living alone; Charlie is still drinking. They meet again; he is repentant and wants her back but she resists his advances.

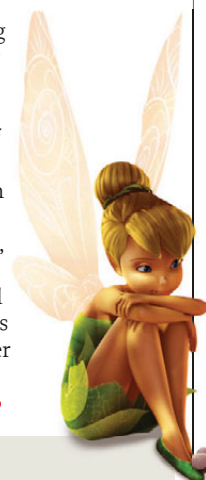
Tinker Bell and the Secret of the Wings

USA 2012 Director: Peggy Holmes Certificate U 75m 2s

Reviewed by Louise Seeley

Under John Lasseter, straight-to-DVD animation franchises such as Disney Fairies are thankfully no longer 'cheapquels'. This Tinkerbell adventure, like its predecessors, can boast high-quality, deeply detailed animation, a thoughtful storyline and expressive voice work from actors such as Anjelica Huston and Timothy Dalton, adding gravitas to the proceedings as Queen Clarion and Lord Milori.

Mindful of its responsibilities to its small-girl audience, the film's themes are child-friendly without feeling sanitised (Tinkerbell is cussedly independent and a serial authority-flouter, determined to reunite with her long-lost sister). It also manages that difficult balancing act of being wholesome rather than piously prescriptive: these fairies nurture nature, pull together in a crisis and are curious about other fairy cultures. There's also a refreshing absence of anything hip, cynical or crassly pushing toy tie-ins. Too bad that the rich colour spectrum of the Tinkerbell series loses some of its pop here, amid an overdose of airborne activity, as autumn leaves, snowflakes and snowy owls swoop relentlessly. Sadly, like most current children's films, it's fallen under the spell of the 3D Fairy, who condemns an entire generation to dimmer visuals, duller colours and pointlessly kinetic plotlines. **S**



Credits and Synopsis

Co-directed by
Bobs Ganaway
Produced by
Michael Wigert
Screenplay
Bobs Ganaway
Peggy Holmes
Ryan Rowe
Tom Rogers
Editor
Mark Rosenbaum
Art Director
Ellen Jin Over
Original Score
Composed and Conducted by
Joel McNeely
Supervising Sound Editor/Designer
Todd Toon
Animation Supervisor
Yuriko Senoo

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Enterprises, Inc.

Production Companies
Produced by
Disneytoon Studios
Executive Producer
John Lasseter

Voice Cast

Mae Whitman
Tinker Bell
Lucy Hale
Periwinkle
Timothy Dalton
Lord Milori
Jeff Bennett
Dewey
Lucy Liu
Silvermist
Raven-Symoné
Iridessa
Megan Hilty
Rosetta
Pamela Adlon
Vidia
Angela Bartys
Fawn

Matt Lanter
Sled
Debbie Ryan
Spike
Grey DeLisle
Gloss
Anjelica Huston
Queen Clarion

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Walt Disney Studios
Motion Pictures

6,753ft +0 frames

US DVD title
Secret of the Wings

Onscreen UK title
TinkerBell and the Secret of the Wings

Pixie Hollow, the early 1900s. Tinkerbell trespasses in the Winter Woods and finds that frost fairy Periwinkle is her long-lost sister. Rulers Queen Clarion and Lord Milori order them to part – warm fairies and winter fairies cannot survive different climates. Tinkerbell builds a snow machine to let Periwinkle visit secretly, but it spreads thick ice across Pixie Hollow when it becomes trapped in the brook. Tinkerbell discovers that a frost coating will save the vital pixie-dust tree. Warm and winter fairies join forces to protect Pixie Hollow, and the fairy frost saves the tree. The sisters are reunited when frost-protected wings make the Winter Woods safe for warm fairies to visit.

The Twilight Saga Breaking Dawn Part II

USA/Canada 2012, Director: Bill Condon, Certificate 12A 115m 6s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This instalment of the *Twilight* franchise (the final one, supposedly, though economics will doubtless command some sort of spin-off) offers its heroine Bella Cullen a singularly managed, manicured and – ironically – bloodless experience of motherhood. Bella (Kristen Stewart), having opted for death in order to birth a living half-vampire child during *Twilight: Breaking Dawn Part I* (2011), is now a vampire herself, and living with her husband Edward (Robert Pattinson) and his friends and family near her hometown of Forks, Washington. The couple's baby, named Renesmee, is largely cared for by others, while Bella accustoms herself to her new super-sharp senses and fierce appetite for sex and flesh.

The film makes much of the former, using swift cuts, swooshy sound effects and intense close-ups on flowers to show us how plugged in to nature Bella suddenly is; but the latter matter of her carnivorous urges is handled as if with tongs. Much is made of Bella and Edward's raging passion ("I'm never going to get tired of this," moons Bella, sounding kind of tired of it, after an afternoon quickie; "Break a lot of stuff?" enquires a fellow vamp when they emerge from their room) – yet in keeping with the peculiar tradition of real-life couples who play couples on screen, Pattinson and Stewart have no chemistry at all. Sure, the film's a 12A, and a graphic humpfest was never on the agenda; but for all their adoring gazes, Edward and Bella barely raise a sexual flutter in the room.

This mutual frigidity is a fine fit for a film that excises everything ickily physical out of its world, from providing each actor with a digitally flawless complexion and evading the whole matter of breastfeeding to taking the bloodshed out of stabbing and decapitation and not actually having anyone consume any haemoglobin. It's a strange quirk of author Stephenie Meyer's take on vampirism that by having her breed not need to sleep, eat, sweat, breathe or even blink, she drains the whole concept of its traditional allegorical force: rather than embodiments of the lusty id, these are shop-window mannequins. And Bella gets to be a mannequin mommy too. She and Edward are gifted a gingerbread-style house by his extended family, the Cullens; she even gets a ready-stocked wardrobe; her baby never cries, though other people always babysit it anyway; her false eyelashes and hair extensions are firmly moored and her breasts don't leak through her postpartum cocktail frock. When seen as a baby, Renesmee is a heavily computer-manipulated construction – an inexplicable move given that she isn't actually required to do anything, but a further fastidiously distancing one.

Most baffling in a franchise celebrated for its teen-baiting emotional intensity is the flip tone it adopts at its most significant moments. No one appears to be taking this seriously, actors and screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg least of all, and yet it's not zesty enough to class as camp. When Edward and Bella encounter the third point in their historical love triangle, buff lycanthrope Jacob (Taylor Lautner), and Bella establishes that he has 'imprinted' on Renesmee (ie claimed her



Bite club: 'The Twilight Saga Breaking Dawn Part II'

as his soulmate), it should surely be a moment of some tension. Instead it's a sickly skitter of inert gags. Stewart's voice dipping into the masculine honk she uses to denote having a feeling, Bella decries Jacob's "moronic wolfy claim" on her child, and then his choice to nickname her Nessie "after the Loch Ness Monster", while Edward stands around looking thoroughly uninterested.

Little Nessie grows at a hectic rate. The Cullens' anaesthetised domestic bliss soon spins out into worldwide vampire unrest, as the powerful Volturi clan get wind of Renesmee's existence and suspect her to be one of the destructive individuals dubbed 'immortal children'. Vampires from many lands show up in skimpy ethnic clothing (which inexplicably suffices in snowbound midwinter Washington

State); there's a nice clean battle scene in which heads pop off as neatly as those of Barbie dolls; and Bella stoically decides that she must send away the child with whom she has spent such intensive quality time. Except that she doesn't. By the end the plot is such an impactless drizzle of disconnected points and characters (a whole load of people are named and pictured over the credits who didn't appear to have speaking parts in the film) that one feels as weary as if one had indeed, in the words of the agonising closing ballad, "loved... for a thousand years". And the whole time, no one feels a thing. And no one bleeds. And teenage girls are coddled with the same fantasy of unsexual sexuality and functionless purity towards which an anorexic tries to starve herself. And it's a travesty. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Wyck Godfrey
Karen Rosenfelt
Stephenie Meyer
Screenplay
Melissa Rosenberg
Based on the novel
Breaking Dawn by
Stephenie Meyer
**Director of
Photography**
Guillermo Navarro
Editors
Virginia Katz
Ian Slater
Production Designer
Richard Sherman
Music
Carter Burwell

Sound Mixer
Steve C. Aaron
Costume Designer
Michael Wilkinson
Visual Effects
Hydraulx - Santa
Monica
Hydraulx - Vancouver
Lola | VFX
Zoic Studios
Los Angeles and
Vancouver
Rodeo FX - Montréal
Spin VFX
Method Studios
- Vancouver
**Visual Effects/
Wolf Animation**
Tippett

**Main Titles/
Visual Effects**
Prologue
Stunt Co-ordinators
Jeff Imada
Scott Ateah

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Entertainment, LLC
**Production
Companies**
Summit
Entertainment
presents a Temple
Hill production
in association
with Sunswept
Entertainment
With the participation

of Province of
British Columbia
Production Services
Tax Credit, Province
of Ontario Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Marty Bowen
Greg Mooradian
Mark Morgan
Guy Oseary

Cast
Kirsten Stewart
Bella Swan
Robert Pattinson
Edward Cullen
Taylor Lautner

Jacob Black
Billy Burke
Charlie Swan
Peter Facinelli
Dr Carlisle Cullen
Elizabeth Reaser
Esme Cullen
Kellan Lutz
Emmett Cullen
Nikki Reed
Rosalie Hale
Jackson Rathbone
Jasper Hale
Ashley Greene
Alice Cullen
Michael Sheen
Aro
Dakota Fanning
Jane

Mackenzie Foy
Renesmee Cullen

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat**
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
El Films

10,359 ft +0 frames

Washington State, US, the present. Bella Cullen is now a vampire, married to Edward and mother to baby Renesmee. They live near her hometown of Forks with other members of the Cullen family. Also around is Jacob, Bella's werewolf ex-suitor, who has 'imprinted' on Renesmee, thus claiming her as his future soulmate. Bella begins to accustom herself to her new skills and instincts as a vampire, and reunites with her father Charlie, though he is kept in the dark as to what she now is. Renesmee develops unnaturally fast and can transmit thoughts with a touch. Cullen cousin Irina visits, and on witnessing these qualities suspects Renesmee to be one of the 'immortal children' who

have recurred through vampire history and caused chaos with their destructive abilities. Irina reports this to the powerful Volturi vampire family, who are concerned. Preparing for a showdown, the Cullens and the Volturi call on their vampire contacts all over the world. It transpires that Bella is a 'shield', able to use her powers to protect others. Bella makes the decision to send Renesmee away with Jacob. Irina is killed for making a false allegation against Renesmee. The Cullen clan, with help from werewolves, battle with the Volturi, though Volturi leader Aro prompts a truce of sorts. Edward, Bella, Jacob, Renesmee and the other Cullens go home.

When Santa Fell to Earth

Germany/Austria 2011
Director: Oliver Dieckmann
Certificate U 107m 21s

Reviewed by Gregory Matthews

A dubbed German/Austrian children's Christmas film may sound an unlikely prospect for UK release, but *When Santa Fell to Earth*, telling of two lonely children helping a youthful Santa to save Christmas, proves something of a delight, with charm enough to overcome its uncharming American dubbing ("You evil jerk!").

Based on the novel by Cornelia Funke, the author behind *Inkheart* (2007), this is lighter fare, although like that film it depicts a fictional world colliding with ours in a battle against fascistic rulers (here, the commerce-driven Great Christmas Council, which has banned Santa's largesse and which turns reindeer into salami). There are also shades of Narnia, with a magical doorway leading to a snowy land where Christmas is crushed. The mixture of fantasy and real-world elements is well judged, the pace is good and the child actors are not annoying, unlike Santa's helpers (two CGI elves and, in a minor nod towards religion, two tiny angels, one of whom looks like Meatloaf).

Ironically, the end credits roll over 'making of' footage of green screens and special-effects rigs, completely breaking the festive spell, as if the Great Christmas Council had sneaked into the cutting room to get the last laugh. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Uschi Reich

Producer

Bernd Krause

Screenplay

Benjamin Biehn

Robin Getrost

Uschi Reich

Based on the

novel *Als der*

Weihnachtsmann

vom Himmel fiel

by Cornelia Funke

Director of

Photography

Alexander

Fischerkoessen

Editor

Christian Nauheimer

Production

Designer

Maximilian Lange

MUSIC

Peter Wolf

Sound

Johannes Paila

Costumes

Andrea Spanier

Visual Effects

Scanline VFX

©Bavaria Filmverleih

und Produktions

GMBH, Wega

roduktionsgesellschaft

M.B.H., Ackermann

Filmproduktion

GMBH & Co.

KG, Kiddinx

Filmproduktion

GMBH

Production

Companies

A Uschi Reich

production for

Bavaria

Filmverleihund

Produktions GMBH

in co-production

with Wega

Filmproduktionsges.

Wifried Ackermann

Filmproduktion,

Kiddinx Film

production

GMBH and ZDF

With the support

FFF

FilmFernsehFonds

Bayern, DFFF

Deutscher

Filmförderfonds, FFA

ilmförderungsanstalt,

Film und

Medienstiftung

NRW, FISA

Filmstandort Austria,

Filmförderung

Land Salzburg

A film by Oliver

Dieckmann

Cast

Alexander Scheer

Niklas Julebukk

Noah Kraus

Ben Schuster

Mercedes

Jadea Diaz

Charlotte

Blumenfeld

Jessica Schwarz

Lena Schuster

Fritz Karl

Fred Schuster

Volker

Lechtenbrink

Gerald Geronimus

Goblynch

Christine Urspruch

Mathilda the angel

Charly Hübner

Emmanuel the angel

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Munro Film Services

9,661 ft +8 frames

German/Austrian

theatrical title

Als der

Weihnachtsmann

vom Himmel fiel

Christmas Land, the present. Niklas Julebukk, the last 'renegade' Santa, flees from the Great Christmas Council, which is led by Gerald Goblynch, and crashlands in Nebelweg, Germany. Niklas befriends a young boy called Ben and explains that the Council has outlawed gift-giving Santas and wants to turn him into ice. Ben and classmate Charlotte track down Niklas's lost reindeer. Niklas pipes in snow from Christmas Land to Nebelweg, but this reveals his whereabouts and Goblynch catches him. A struggle ensues and Goblynch turns to ice. Ben's family makes friends with Charlotte's family, and Niklas brings them gifts before departing.

You Will Be My Son

France 2011
Director: Gilles Legrand

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A classy slab of French filial angst with a heady whiff of the vineyard, this prestige package doesn't exactly take artistic risks, but marries a compelling story with expert use of a fine cast to very satisfying effect. Particularly well deployed is the French/Danish powerhouse Niels Arestrup, playing an ageing winemaker with a timebomb of a grudge against his son and heir. While not exactly the type to disappear into a range of roles – shopworn, loveless dads and dad-figures are increasingly his stock-in-trade, as evidenced by his work with Jacques Audiard in *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* and *A Prophet* – Arestrup has become one of those performers from whom it's hard to wrest the eyes.

Upon determining that his business partner François (Patrick Chesnais) is terminally ill, Arestrup's character, Paul de Marseul, must appoint a successor to help run his lush and lucrative estate. The natural candidate is his earnest, kindly son Martin (Lorant Deutsch) – but natural bonds signify little to Paul. Little, or altogether too much; he simply can't be near Martin without criticising the younger man's every move. Deutsch's performance – never ingratiating but often excruciatingly moving – captures all the grief and confusion of never quite being good enough for one's paterfamilias.

Just as Paul is reluctantly coming around to giving Martin a chance – induced to do so, implicitly, by his son finally showing some teeth and demanding the opportunity – François's critical illness draws his son Philippe home from a starry gig working for the Coppola wine business in California. Having walked out on the job, Philippe claims to have effectively unemployed himself (a somewhat unpersuasive plot machination, given the presumable existence of the concept of compassionate leave even within the big-bucks booze business, but a



Planet of the grapes: Arestrup, Bridet, Deutsch

forgivable one) – thus making him available to oust the biological successor. Paul's preference for Philippe – who, as embodied by the unavoidably dashing Nicolas Bridet, even looks like a more coiffed and confident version of weaselly Martin – is painfully obvious enough; but the film's narrative trump card is the fact that a quirk of French law permits it to become a legal matter. "You can adopt anyone," notes Paul's self-satisfied lawyer. "It's led to some marvellous family feuds."

The script bristles with sore little ironies, pointed but not laboured – as when, after Martin suffers a (spectacularly filmed) car crash, the paramedic tells the father who has just brutally rejected him, "I found you under 'Dad' in his phone." And while the film can feel a touch by-the-book in presentational terms, it bodyswerves a lot of too-obvious plot choices, for instance by having Martin's gorgeous wife (the appropriately surnamed Anne Marivin) stay loyal in the face of Philippe's inevitable seduction attempt. If Francis Ford Coppola himself, or some other savvy Californian, isn't eyeing this for an English-language remake, he's sleeping on the job. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Frédéric Brillion

Gilles Legrand

Screenplay

Gilles Legrand

Delphine De Vigan

Director of

Photography

Yves Angelo

Editor

Andréa Sedlackova

Art Director

Aline Bonetto

Original Music

Armand Amar

Sound

Pierre Garnet

Thomas

Desjonqueres

Anne Le Campion

Costumes

Tess Hammami

Hélène Vaduva

Zahia Medar

Mathilde Ballu

©Epithète Films

Production

Companies

Epithète Films

presents with the

participation of

Orange Cinéma

Séries in association

with Soficas Banque

Postale Image 4,

A Plus Image 2,

Cinéma 5 and

Manon a film by

Gilles Legrand

Project developed

with the support

of Epithète

Developpement

With the support

of Angoa-Agicco

In partnership with

Centre National de

la Cinématographie

Cast

Niels Arestrup

Paul de Marseul

Lorant Deutsch

Martin de Marseul

Patrick Chesnais

François Amelot

Anne Marivin

Alice de Marseul

Nicolas Bridet

Philippe Amelot

Valérie Maïresse

Madeleine Amelot

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Swipe Films

French theatrical title

Tu seras mon fils

but François is clearly uncomfortable with the idea. At the grave of Martin's late mother, Paul reveals to Martin that he blames her death on the toll taken by her overprotective parenting. Madeleine, Philippe, Paul and the increasingly frail François have an awkward dinner to affirm Philippe's decision to accept the job, and thus the adoption; Martin drinks alone, and crashes his car. Alice visits him in hospital and reveals that she is pregnant. François is told that his chemotherapy is no longer working, but he leads Philippe and Paul to believe that he has had a positive prognosis. Philippe asks Paul to close up the airless storage basement; François follows Paul down and locks him in, allowing him to suffocate. Martin has his father incinerated, shares a last glass of wine with the ashes, and dumps them in the vineyard.

Home cinema



A hero betrayed: Paul Richter in 'Siegfried', the first part of Fritz Lang's 'Die Nibelungen'

LANG THE DEFIANT

Whether working in Europe or in exile, Fritz Lang impressed his unmistakable worldview on to celluloid like no other director, as two new releases remind us

DIE NIBELUNGEN

Germany 1924; Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 282 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: booklet with writing by Michael Powell, Geoffrey O'Brien, Lotte H. Eisner and Tom Gunning, documentary on the restoration

FRITZ LANG: THE EARLY WORKS

Harakiri/The Wandering Shadow/Four Around the Woman

Germany 1919/20/21; Kino Classics/Region 1 DVD; 87/67/84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The two-disc Blu-ray release of Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, the 2010 restoration by the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung now available from Masters of Cinema, includes newsreel footage of Lang on the set of his epic 1924 diptych. He is 33 years old, self-consciously

iconic in puttees and monocle, directing an army of Huns, extras culled from among Weimar Germany's countless unemployed. The director himself is secure at the top of his profession, commanding the full resources of the mighty UFA-Babelsberg machine, not inconsiderable during that fleeting historical oasis when the industrious German genius hadn't yet dedicated itself to rearmament.

In the years ahead, Lang would lose Europe, lose much of his reputation... even live on to see his stock rise again. But the story of exile is not unusual for a European of Lang's generation. What is unusual about Lang's case is the single-mindedness with which he would, in exile, continue impressing his unmistakable worldview on to celluloid, smothering his subjects in insoluble moral dilemmas charted out with the same hard line whether they be kaiser of all Babelsberg or tenant of a flimsy *House by the River* on the Republic Pictures lot.

Evidence of the extraordinary consistency of vision in Lang's career is available in a new three-disc set called *Fritz Lang: The Early Works*, released by Kino Classics. The earliest of the lot, 1919's *Harakiri*, is based on *Madame Butterfly*,

the raw materials of which had already been reworked in John Luther Long's story, David Belasco's play and Puccini's opera. Lil Dagover stars as the faithful O-Take-san, while the American Pinkerton has been replaced by a Swede (Niels Prien), almost hilariously blithe in his obliviousness to the consequences of his fecklessness. In *Harakiri*'s architectonic eye, its orientalist orientation, its prowling priests, its temples forbidden to westerners on pain of death, its interracial longing – Lang's now-lost first feature was a 1919 work titled *Halbblut* (*Half-Blood*) – much can already be found to predict Lang's penultimate film of 40 years hence, 1959's *Indian Epic*.

Like everything in Lang, this harmony seems a matter of design. That capstone work, the *Indian Epic*, was in fact a revived script from 1919 – Lang's first collaboration with actress-turned-novelist/scenarist Thea von Harbou – which was taken away from him by his then employer Joe May on the excuse that the youthful director was not yet experienced enough to handle a project of such scope. Kino's set makes available, in the truncated state in which it has come down to us, Lang

and von Harbou's first finished collaboration, 1920's *The Wandering Shadow*, made for Joe May's production company May-Film and starring the producer's wife. Mia May plays Irmgard Vanderheit, who finds herself fleeing across misty meadows and craggy peaks – her unhappy marriage with a public advocate of free love has apparently ended in his suicide, and her husband's identical twin brother gives chase, until they discover guess who still alive, living in monastic solitude in the wilderness. (Hans Marr plays the double role.)

Rudolf Klein-Rogge, then von Harbou's husband and soon to star for Lang as Dr Mabuse, plays a cousin of the Vanderheits. He also appears in 1921's *Four Around the Woman* as a fence who deals diamonds from an underworld bar frequented by a motley crowd including long-separated twin brothers played by Anton Edthofer. (The doppelgänger device was a weakness of von Harbou's arabesque early scripts.) One brother is a ship's stoker, the other a man about town; the film's snappy shifts between penthouse and pavement – prototypes of the *M* match cuts emphasising social opposites in their mirror-image nature – are what command attention today, while the milieu predicts the relentlessly of-the-moment *Mabuse*.

"My crusade for free love has caused me countless troubles," sighs one of *The Wandering Shadow*'s titles – a sentiment that Lang and von Harbou might well have understood, for it is sometime in this period that she left Klein-Rogge to conduct an escalating affair with Lang – a situation to which Lang's then wife so much protested as to put a bullet in her chest, leaving the lovers free to marry. It was on location for *The Wandering Shadow* in the Bavarian Alps, so feelingly shot by Guido Seeber, that Lang received word that Joe May was absconding with the *Indian Epic*. And though the disappointment rankled through decades to come, only a couple of years later Lang was in a position to embark on an even greater saga of his own, with von Harbou's help.

The source of Lang and von Harbou's project was the *Nibelungenlied*, an epic poem of the early 13th century which recounts the great victories of the hero Siegfried, his marriage at the court of the Burgundians to Kriemhild, the king's sister, his death thanks to a betrayal within the court, and Kriemhild's subsequent long-game plot for revenge through marriage to Etzel, aka Attila, king of the half-savage Huns. The material was divided into two parts – *Siegfried* and *Kriemhild's Revenge* – finally totalling a little under five hours altogether.

As with any period film, *Die Nibelungen* is as much about the time when it was made as the time when it is set. Siegfried is played by Paul Richter, prone to dynamic deco voguing. When he first appears, with his hairless torso shining in the glow of a blacksmith's forge, he might have stepped right off the cover of one of the 'body culture' magazines that had begun to proliferate in Berlin at the time. While stopping just short of Anni Albers-style



Lang and Thea von Harbou

textiles, costume designer Aenne Willkomm clads the Burgundian court in tunics of stark and startling geometry, like a pack of Bauhaus playing cards, while amid the primitive splendour of the Huns, Kriemhild (Margarete Schön) glints in a lapidary dress from the House of Klimt. And, just as *The Wandering Shadow* broaches the modern dilemma of free love, in *Siegfried* the brazen New Woman appears in the guise of an Ancient Woman – Brunhild (Hanna Ralph), warrior queen of Iceland. Acting as a sort of physical Cyrano for timid King Gunther of Burgundy (Theodor Loos), Siegfried helps him win Brunhild's heart by surreptitiously besting her in track-and-field contests after they've travelled to her sapphic stronghold, a craggy citadel poised beneath the orange-dyed glow of the Northern Lights.

This and other fancies conjured by the three-headed art-director team of Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut and Karl Vollbrecht amount to a stunning achievement in impressing imagination on to film – *Die Nibelungen* is one of those movies whose description invariably threatens to become a checklist of splendours, hardly hoping to convey the cumulative effect. Better that you discover them yourself. Only that which once was the film's greatest claim to fame, Siegfried's slaying of his dragon, has lost its ability to astonish over the years. Once a miracle of special effects, requiring six or eight men to make it shimmy about and hack up fire, the dragon, with its lumbering waddle and somewhat pacific mien, has an inadvertently amiable character, and gives Siegfried's valorous deed the air of an unprovoked assault.

The particular blend of the ultramodern and the barbarian that commingles in *Die Nibelungen* would be greatly influential in Germany in years to come. "Here is a story not pulled out of the past," said Joseph Goebbels, "but rather so

The particular blend of the ultramodern and the barbarian would be greatly influential in Germany in years to come

modern, so timely, so realistically created that it has shaken even the fighters in the National Socialist movement." This is excerpted in Guido Altendorf and Anke Wilkening's *The Legacy of Die Nibelungen* (included in the Masters of Cinema set), a documentary exploring the film's loaded history as well as the process whereby the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung stitched together the available materials into something resembling as closely as possible a definitive version of Lang's vision. Altendorf and Wilkening's film notes not only Goebbels's eventual appropriation of *Die Nibelungen* as a benchmark of 'national' cinema, but also his less-than-worshipful view of the film when he first saw it in 1924 and declared Ralph's Brunhild to be "like a Jewess who has just stepped out of a Frankfurt fur shop". The view expressed by film critic and writer Siegfried Kracauer in his 1947 book *From Caligari to Hitler* – that Alberich, the acquisitive dwarf who guards the Nibelungen treasure, is a caricatured Jew – did not occur to this viewer, though a cartooned Semite does unmistakably appear in the fence's bar in *Four Around the Woman*; the best that can be said is that he is no more grotesque than the gentiles who surround him.

But are not *Die Nibelungen*'s Burgundians the most grotesque of all? The purging holocaust of a conclusion to *Kriemhild's Revenge* has them driven to extinction by their unbending loyalty to the various oaths they've sworn – Kriemhild's to avenge the murder of Siegfried, even at the cost of her own kin; her kin's to shield the guilty Hagen Tronje (Hans Adalbert Schlettow) from that revenge, however clear it is that this man, responsible for a cowardly assassination and a psychotic infanticide, badly needs killing. "You do not understand the German soul, Lord Attila," the king of the Huns (Klein-Rogge again) is chidingly informed as Tronje's comrades refuse to surrender him to save themselves. This may be taken as Lang and von Harbou's expression of mystical awe at the iron Teutonic will, but we have seen Attila dandling his child with simple joy, while Kriemhild seems capable only of standing stock still with a transfixed gaze. As in the story of King Gunther and Brunhild, the film takes for granted the appeal of proud, hard and contemptuous women – perhaps there is a touch of Sacher-Masoch here, indicating shadier corners of that vaunted German soul.

Die Nibelungen's inescapably controversial opening title reads, "Dedicated to the German People" – and perhaps Lang and von Harbou caught them as they were, in their romance, in their capacity for foolhardy, suicidal devotion regardless of cause. Something else was caught as well. In *Die Nibelungen*'s climax, Lang the exacting taskmaster is evident in scenes where actors have been driven to risk life and limb among burning timbers and caving stairwells. In this drive that will sacrifice anything for a shot, another ineffaceable will is clear – the monomaniacal will that spent 20 years in Hollywood and remained eternally an unmovable object. It's Lang the Defiant. ☹

New releases

BONJOUR TRISTESSE

Otto Preminger; US 1958; Twilight Time/Region 1 DVD; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Available exclusively from www.screenarchives.com

Reviewed by Peter Tonguet

Because *Bonjour tristesse* has become synonymous with Jean Seberg (who won her part in *Breathless* on the strength of her performance here), it is surprising to remember that Deborah Kerr received top billing. Perhaps it was director Otto Preminger's nod to Kerr's middle-aged sophistication, especially since the film concerns the carelessness of overgrown children.

In that category are Raymond (David Niven) and his 17-year-old daughter Cecile (Seberg), who spend their days lounging on the French Riviera. As he carries on affairs and thumbs through *Elle* magazine, she sunbathes and keeps at the ready a stock of ice cream as a cure-all for hangovers. Though he is a businessman, she a philosophy student, their time is spent at parties and casinos. Enter Kerr's Anne, a demure but stylish fashion designer who frowns on their vulgar torpor. In hindsight, Cecile naively attributes the unhappy end of their story to bad omens, but it is curiosity that kills the cat: intrigued by the prospect of a more settled existence, Raymond decides to wed Anne. Naturally, Cecile cannot abide the pending marriage and the doom it spells for her loafing lifestyle.

Anne and Raymond try to put the kibosh on Cecile's slatternly listlessness, but the wild thing insists that she is too old to be given orders. Cecile doth protest too much: after one argument, she storms into her room, plops on to her cushy bed and sticks pins into a doll (meant to be Anne) – is that the best way to persuade others of one's maturity? Seberg is so convincing as a coddled teen that we forget we're supposed to be on the Continent: the Iowa native might just as well be in a rage over not being named Homecoming Queen.

Kerr doesn't play Anne as a Mommie Dearest; instead of seeming like a scold, she is comely in her wholesomeness. While Anne tells Cecile, "I'm not your governess" – hilariously holding Cecile's chin in her hand as she says the line – the character clearly anticipates the greatest role of Kerr's career: the sympathetic governess stuck with two sinister children in *The Innocents* (1961).

Adapting Françoise Sagan's novel, screenwriter Arthur Laurents skilfully dramatises the trio's confrontations, although the voiceover narration is painfully simpleminded, as when Cecile reflects: "Part of me was angry, part of me was happy, all of me was excited." (Not exactly the deep thoughts one expects from a supposed devotee of Pascal and Spinoza.) Preminger's direction is also unusually slack. In the climax, for example, viewers are asked to believe that Cecile goes unnoticed as she follows a few paces behind Anne in broad daylight. It seems as if the laziness of Raymond, Cecile and their gang was contagious.

Disc: Stellar picture and audio, but no supplementary material.

THE COLDITZ STORY

Guy Hamilton; UK 1955; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Colditz Revealed' documentary, restoration comparison

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Shot at Shepperton on not altogether convincing sets, Guy Hamilton's drama about British POWs has the strange effect at times of making Colditz resemble a minor British public school, with prisoners split across national lines as if members of rival houses. What the Brits, Poles and French all share is a desperate desire to escape. And given that Pat Reid (a British officer who really did manage to get out of Colditz) was a technical consultant on the film, one guesses that this must be a fairly accurate depiction of the prisoners' lives inside the gothic-looking castle.

The world here is a long way removed from what we know of Holocaust-themed dramas: the Germans treat the prisoners with a measure of respect, even allowing them to stage plays (which, of course, are used for plotting escapes), and senior officers such as Eric Portman's Colonel Richmond are given special privileges. John Mills plays Pat Reid as a cheery, redoubtable everyman with a hint of Tintin about him, while Christopher Rhodes, a real-life war hero, registers strongly as the reckless, kilt-wearing Mac.

At some points Hamilton veers towards more thoughtful, *Grande Illusion*-style drama, but generally the emphasis is firmly on action, with Mills and co far too busy burrowing, climbing or imitating German officers for introspection or existential musing.

Disc: The film has been handsomely restored in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the 'original escape'. The documentary features interviews with the last surviving British POWs.

FILMS BY VICTOR ERICE

The Spirit of the Beehive

Spain 1973; Vértice Cine/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: trailers

The South

Spain/France 1983; Vértice Cine/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 95 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: trailers

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"I know what happens in movies isn't real," affirms the father in Víctor Erice's second feature *The South*, although he's clearly just as

spellbound by their ineffable luminescence as is the child Ana in the earlier *The Spirit of the Beehive*. As indeed is Erice himself: shot after shot betrays a thrall to the potency of light emerging from darkness, the way that recently exhaled cigarette smoke hangs suspended in the air, or the almost infinitesimal shifts in colour that accompany the sun's rays when filtered through clouds or frosted glass.

In *Beehive*, Ana fuses her obsession with James Whale's *Frankenstein* (more specifically, the encounter between Boris Karloff's monster and a little girl like her) with her real-life discovery of a wounded Civil War veteran, whom she adopts as her own pet 'monster' in complete ignorance of surrounding political realities. Ana Torrent's utterly guileless but infinitely suggestive performance remains one of cinema's miracles: when Erice realised what he was capturing, her screen time grew while that of her onscreen parents correspondingly shrank.

Presumably Erice's original conception made more of Ana's beekeeping father (Fernando Fernán Gómez): there are hints of what would flower into the acutely nuanced father-daughter relationship at the heart of *The South*, in which young Estrella, played by Sonsoles Aranguren (Icía Bollain is the older Estrella), muses on her father's constant disappearances to 'the South', a mythical, possibly magical landscape that we never see ourselves. As the father, Omero Antonutti, a firm-purposed, saturnine regular in Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's films, is a constant mental presence (if frequent physical absence) in her life, emerging from the shadows to hypnotise her with a twinkling pendulum or quietly hum 'Blue Moon' to a trashy cinema melodrama prior to writing its surprised star a fan letter. Estrella complains that they never talk seriously, but their lengthy silences are as eloquent as the most garrulous discussion – indeed, it's when they properly converse that the now adolescent Estrella's illusions begin to crumble. **Discs:** *Beehive* is at a screen-filling 16:9 (like the correctly framed *The South*, it should be a slightly narrower 1.66:1), the somewhat contrasty picture has a tendency to swallow shadow detail (*The South* is especially prone to this), and there appears to have been some artificial sharpening that works against the cinematography's natural grain. However, these budget-priced Spanish Blu-rays make a decent fist of capturing the films' essence. The optional English subtitles are clear and idiomatic.

FLOATING WEEDS

Ozu Yasujiro; Japan 1959; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG (tbc); 119/114 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

This remake of Ozu's 1935 silent *A Story of Floating Weeds* adds sound and colour but otherwise closely resembles the earlier film, in which a troupe of travelling actors arrive in a small town and their leader is reunited with his illegitimate son. As with Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (originally made in 1934, remade in 1955), a greatly



Daddy's girl: 'The South'



IN THE SAME BOAT

An Eisenstein/Grierson double bill shows how the influence of *Battleship Potemkin* cast a long shadow over the British documentary movement

THE SOVIET INFLUENCE: BATTLESHIP POTESKIN AND DRIFTERS

Sergei Eisenstein/John Grierson; USSR/UK 1925/29; BFI/Region B Blu-Ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 69/41 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Granton Trawler' (John Grierson, 1934), 'Trade Tattoo' (Len Lye, 1937), 'North Sea' (Harry Watt, 1938), booklet with essays by Henry K. Miller, Patrick Russell and Michael Brooke

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The development of the British documentary film owes Douglas Fairbanks a great debt. It was the swashbuckling heartthrob who, after being bowled over by its Berlin premiere in April 1926, brought word of *Battleship Potemkin*'s brilliance to New York – and, indirectly, to John Grierson. The 28-year-old Grierson was working as a journalist for the *New York Sun* when the rumours about Sergei Eisenstein's film reached his ears. Along with a colleague, he decided that *Potemkin* should be shown in the city, and later that year they arranged for it to run for almost two months at the Biltmore Theatre in Manhattan.

On his return to his native Britain in 1927, Grierson would screen *Potemkin* again, for an audience of ministers and civil servants as a demonstration of the propaganda value of the cinema. The Whitehall contingent were suitably impressed and went on to hire Grierson to make his first film, a promo for the British fishing industry. The previous year, their peers at the Home Office had been every bit as convinced of *Potemkin*'s propagandistic power – swiftly calling on the BBFC to ban it, lest, as the *Express* reported, it "send the country crashing to red ruin".

Still considered too dangerous for public consumption, in 1929 *Battleship Potemkin* sailed again, at a private screening for members of the Film Society in London, and this time it shared the bill with, among other titles, Grierson's finished fishing film, *Drifters*. The object of the BFI's new five-film set, and the accompanying essays, is to replicate that double-bill, and to explore how far the shadow of *Potemkin*'s influence was cast across Grierson's work and the documentary movement he famously led.

Battleship Potemkin is presented here glowing from its recent 4K restoration, which reinstated a clutch of missing shots, and with a recording of Edmund Meisel's pulsing orchestral score, written for that fateful Berlin show. By contrast, while *Drifters* has also had some work done to clean it up, it plays with Jason Singh's atmospheric 'vocal sculpture' music, which layers beatboxing over sounds



Red seas: Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 classic 'Battleship Potemkin'

made with the musician's own mouth but distorted to evoke waves and seagulls. It's a decision that emphasises the many differences between the two films, Singh's stripped-down score, while effective, reminding the viewer of the slightness of *Drifters* in comparison to the Soviet heavyweight.

And there is a broad gulf between these two: Eisenstein's film, as is well known, dramatises and embellishes a mutiny in the failed Russian revolution of 1905. The sailors defy their masters, a life is lost in the skirmish and subsequently mourned on shore in Odessa. The Cossacks quash a demonstration on the town steps with bloody violence; the battleship retaliates and sails home with its red flag high. The heroics in *Drifters* are also mighty, but more everyday: a group of fishermen work hard, put in long hours and face down

a storm in order to bring in their herring catch. There is a villain in the piece, but it's a dogfish prowling among the netted herring.

Artistically, *Potemkin*'s impact on the British film is unmistakable. Grierson claimed to know Eisenstein's masterpiece "foot by foot, and cut by cut" and it shows, in the deep close-ups of the ship's clanking, thrusting mechanics, as well as the handsome compositions of strong men, magnificent boats and dappled seas. Most obviously, Grierson's editing is often every bit as choppy as the North Sea waters, and his fishermen cast their nets to the same repetitive beat that Eisenstein's men hurl plates and clench their fists to.

If it sounds a little perverse, that's because it is. By making an Eisensteinian film for the Empire Marketing Board, Grierson was effectively appropriating the stylistics of a revolutionary work of art to further the trade interests of the state that banned it. It's enough to make a good socialist feel seasick.

Regardless, the wave of Soviet inspiration that knocked young Grierson off his feet would spread to his later work and that of his fellow documentary-makers. To illustrate this, the set includes three GPO films. There's Grierson's *Granton Trawler* (1934), a powerful short with a stark, realist sound design by Alberto Cavalcanti, which retreads some of the same water as *Drifters* but does so exceedingly well. There's also Len Lye's *Trade Tattoo* (1937): kaleidoscopic Technicolor cut-ups arranged to a swing soundtrack and swirling to build a paean to British labour. Proving that eventually the highest wave becomes a ripple, the set concludes with *Night Mail* director Harry Watt's *North Sea* (1938), a half-hour dramatisation of a fishing boat in peril. It has little of the bite found in the headline features, save for one evil-eyed catfish squirming on the deck.



Net work: John Grierson's 'Drifters'

New releases

expanded running time (119 minutes as opposed to 86 minutes) allows for a more leisurely pace – though the 1935 version didn't exactly feel hurried – and helps to position this sublime film as one of those 'late' works in which an artist's favourite themes and motifs are revisited with both a new serenity and a willingness to accept the transitory quality of existence. Ozu's emphasis on life's impermanent nature (beautifully visualised here by the complex use of boats and trains) is summed up when his protagonist Komajuro (Nakamura Ganjiro) acknowledges that "the only constant is change."

Floating Weeds, even more than the 1935 film, emphasises its characters' insistence on playing 'roles' both on and off stage: the actors spend at least as much time looking at members of the audience (whom they spy on from behind a curtain) as the audience spends looking at them, and Ozu suggests the theatrical undercurrents of the meticulously planned seduction of Kiyoshi (Kawaguchi Hiroshi) by Kayo (Wakao Ayako) by setting their rendezvous in a deserted theatre (the equivalent scene in the first version takes place outdoors, to quite different effect). Though most of these individuals regard themselves as helpless pawns of fate – the phrase "can't be helped" is used at several points – they nonetheless actively resist familial structures, which are associated with power struggles. Kiyoshi's relationship with Komajuro is initially one of relaxed friendliness, tensions arising only when the latter is revealed to be the boy's father. Ozu is commonly seen as venerating the family, yet he portrays Komajuro's eventual decision to abandon his son and common-law wife as unambiguously positive, the final scene, in which a patriarch who has renounced the right to control his family is observed sitting contentedly on a train, connecting directly with the climax of the previous year's *Equinox Flower*. **Disc:** The Blu-ray transfer is virtually flawless. The booklet features a new essay by critic Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, archival imagery and new translations of excerpts of Ozu's 1959 diary.

GATE OF HELL

Kinugasa Teinosuke; Japan 1953; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 89 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A leading entry in the vanguard of Japanese cinema at the time of its belated discovery in the west in the early 1950s, *Gate of Hell* was the first Japanese film to nab the top prize at Cannes and the country's second Best Foreign Film Oscar-winner (after *Rashomon*), much to the surprise of its veteran director Kinugasa Teinosuke, who'd never rated it particularly highly. Certainly it comes off a poor second when set against its exact contemporary *Ugetsu monogatari* – Mizoguchi Kenji packs more raw emotional power into individual scenes than Kinugasa conjures throughout the whole of his film.

However, *Gate of Hell* does have numerous historical virtues, starting with the visual treatment. It wasn't Japan's first colour feature but it was the first one to be distributed



Pawn of fate: 'Floating Weeds'

internationally, and it's clear from the self-conscious set and Oscar-winning costume designs that it was primarily intended to catch the eye. In his 1955 essay 'Imagination and Colour' (a pertinent extract from which is included in the accompanying booklet), Carl Theodor Dreyer used Kinugasa's film as an exemplar of colour filmmaking that "should encourage western directors to use colours more purposefully and also with greater boldness and imagination". Vivid reds, greens, purples and turquoises abound, especially in the large-scale invasion set piece that opens the film and some of the pageantry thereafter.

One could concoct an exceptionally misleading trailer from the above elements, because the bulk of the film is actually an intimate chamber piece concerning an irresolvable love triangle in which junior samurai Morito (Hasegawa Kazuo) falls helplessly in love with Kesa (*Ugetsu*'s Kyo Machiko) and tries to secure a formal betrothal, despite the fact that she's already married to

one of his seniors – thus causing Morito to pass through his own psychological gate of hell to rank alongside the actual *jigokumon* on which the heads of defeated enemies are displayed.

Disc: Sourced from last year's Kadokawa restoration, this is in excellent shape for a nearly 60-year-old Eastmancolor film. There's hardly a visual blemish to be seen and the colours in the exterior scenes ring true, so it's safe to assume that the more stylised studio interiors are equally on the money – though the level of detail also emphasises the actors' heavy makeup. The 24-page booklet offers a new essay by *S&S* contributor Philip Kemp (who, commendably, doesn't soft-pedal the film's faults) and the above-mentioned Dreyer piece.

FILMS BY KIM KIDUK

Crocodile/Arirang

South Korea 1996/2011; Terracotta Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 99/90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1/16:9; Features: filmography, trailer

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Given that the films of South Korean auteur Kim Kiduk thrive on uncomfortable, often violent confrontation, it's little surprise that the same is true of the nakedly personal *Arirang*, though here it's between director and viewer. Produced after an unprecedented three-year silence following a near-fatal accident involving actress Lee Nayong during the shooting of Kim's *Dream* (2008), it shows Kim retreating into hermit-like isolation in a rundown mountain shack where, like Samuel Beckett's Krapp, he muses over his past, his reputation (locally and internationally), his psychological state and his feelings of betrayal by former collaborators.

He talks to himself and his shadow (both pre-recorded), oscillating between sober lucidity



Gate of Hell It's clear from the self-conscious set and Oscar-winning costume designs that the film was primarily intended to catch the eye

and drunken incoherence, regularly breaking into shaky renditions of the traditional folksong 'Arirang', sometimes with a beer bottle as makeshift microphone. Revisiting his most celebrated film *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring* (2003), he breaks into keening sobs, before going on what appears to be a score-settling killing spree. This last section is obviously fictional, but the accuracy of the rest is equally dubious: the film initially resembles a fly-on-the-wall documentary, but when Kim reveals that it's a completely solo project it becomes clear that even 'spontaneous' moments required meticulous advance positioning of his digital camera.

Although sometimes weirdly compelling, *Arirang* isn't recommended for newcomers to, or non-fans of, Kim's work, though the double-bill pairing with his debut *Crocodile* proves surprisingly apposite. Virtually unseen at the time, this also has rough edges galore (Kim had no formal training in film), but it's a remarkably confident piece, presenting numerous characteristic themes and motifs in embryonic form. The homeless criminal 'Crocodile' (regular male lead Cho Jaehyun) could hardly be more of an antihero – his treatment of the woman he saves from drowning foreshadows the troublingly misogynist undercurrent bubbling through much of Kim's work, albeit accompanied by some not particularly exculpatory self-loathing ("You bitch. You're trying to touch my heart. Don't touch trash"). But the silent underwater space that he constructs for himself in the river is eerily beautiful, all the more so for appearing so incongruously at odds with the violent squalor elsewhere.

Discs: The DVD of *Arirang* wasn't submitted for review, but the transfer of this digitally shot piece should be a marked advance on the one for *Crocodile*. Presumably sourced from an elderly analogue tape, the smeary picture is at its worst in brightly lit scenes, where moving objects develop thick halos.

LONDON ON THE MOVE: BRITISH TRANSPORT COLLECTION VOLUME 10

British Transport Films; UK 1951-83; BFI/Region 2; Certificate E; 201 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: 1947 Crown Film Unit documentary 'Moving Millions', illustrated booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

After a four-year break and what some suspected might be a valedictory box-set, the BFI has corralled a first-rate selection of London Transport films from the British Transport Collection archives to create this capital-themed release. Where industrial film collections often seem like histories of vanished worlds (the National Coal Board and the GPO visibly losing their central places in the nation's story, for instance), these beautifully crafted films show off a transport system burgeoning in the post-war period and still key to London's success.

Pleasingly diverse, the 13 pieces in this collection run from cosy training films such as *Our Canteens* (1951), in which female catering staff calm hungry bus drivers with soothing words, to promotional works like



Lost souls: 'Long Day's Journey into Night'

London on the Move (1970), proudly showing off the "one-class system with a first-class look". Nimble history lessons in *Omnibus 150* (1979) trace the London bus's journey from George Shillebeer's bone-shaking 1829 omnibus onwards, while *Moving London* (1983) records the network's progress from tram and trolley-car to CCTV and Heathrow expansion, breathless at the idea of "linking Piccadilly Circus with a Jumbo jet". A comic narrative of a lost tortoise enlivens the careful explanations of Lost Property Office arca in *Cine Gazette No. 14: Do You Remember?* (1955), while in *Overhaul* (1957), scriptwriter Paul Le Saux's commentary is as graceful as the Routemaster carcasses gliding airborne at Aldenham works.

The standout inclusions are a pair of stylish documentaries, both shot by Oscar-winning *Chariots of Fire* cinematographer David Watkin in his early days with the British Transport Films. *Under Night Streets* (1958) is a jaunty look at the hidden night-time world of underground cleaners, 'fluffers' and maintenance crews, all filmed in a gorgeous monochrome which transforms the repair of a broken rail into a tense, against-the-clock challenge. Watkin took ten years amassing the wide-ranging footage of *All That Mighty Heart* (1963), a colourful day-in-the-life portrait of Londoners teeming across the city from dawn till midnight, the day's progression signalled by snatches of *Housewives' Choice* and *That Was the Week That Was*.

Dare one hope that TfL has been recording the progress of Crossrail, or the network's Olympic experience, with equal assiduousness and expertise, for future generations?

Discs: Excellent transfers (*Under Night Streets* is positively luminous), packaged with nicely detailed notes by Stephen Edwards. There is also a 1947 Crown Film Unit short entitled *Moving Millions*, which hymns the system that "shunts us to and fro over the tortuous expanse that is London".

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Sidney Lumet; US 1962; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 170 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1.

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Eugene O'Neill's epic autobiographical hell-plunge into family necrosis has its definitive manifestation here, shot by young TV vet Sidney Lumet at the height of both the American theatre's so-called golden age and the post-war explosion of hyperventilating theatrical mega-drama on television (often live) and in the cinema, a feverish patch of US film that comes at us now like a vision from After the Fall, the pictures taken together resembling a hothouse asylum of sweaty, kabuki-esque lost souls on the perpetual brink of nervous collapse. In this claustrophobic landscape of Rod Steigers, Lee J. Cobbs, Geraldine Pages and Sidney Poitiers, the scenery and each other's flesh was all there was for lunch, and the combustible expressiveness of contemporaneous Italian and British films proved to be mild by comparison.

In this four-person torture-chamber play, the O'Neill family, pretty closely evoked, is driven towards static zombiehood by an unholy quadrangle of afflictions: morphine addiction, alcoholism, consumption and a generalised grief for opportunities lost and yet to be unattained. It's been dubbed the playwright's masterpiece (the film bears no screenwriter credit, using the play as it was written), and its arch, expository flood of rancorous talk is still, like nearly all theatre pieces, more easily digested in person than on film. The four-way dynamic O'Neill crafted from life provides plenty of sorrowful tension, but whereas each role is a different test of its actor's essential dramatic gravity, its resonance varies according to how well O'Neill understood the family member in question. Thus Jason Robards, as the life-hating boozehound son Jamie, whose real-life counterpart drank himself to death decades before the play was written, is the least convincing, and Katharine Hepburn's watery-eyed, morphine-addicted mother remains a spectacle and a mystery. Dean Stockwell's Eugene avatar, the youngest son cursed with TB, and Ralph Richardson's ageing-lion father are, on the other hand, immediately believable and fascinating, though one is reminded of the impossibility of Richardson ever having delivered a dull line-reading in his entire career or failing to invest effortlessly any moment at all with seething intelligence. Lumet knew it too – the river of bickering and speeches storms by, but then the film cuts to Richardson in close-up, listening to the others, and the tragedy catches fire.

Not as ingeniously staged as Lumet's 12 *Angry Men* five years earlier, *Long Day's Journey into Night* is a family melodrama shaped like a slow-closing iron maiden, with its shadows and angles sharpening as the hours progress. (The DP was, almost axiomatically, Boris Kaufman.) Buy into the grandstanding, exposed-soul form of the thing, and it's the genre's 'Pathétique'.

Disc: A clean archival print from Olive Films, but no accompanying extras.



SHOCHIKU'S SCHLOCK WAVE

In the 1960s, the highbrow studio best known for Ozu and Mizoguchi briefly tried its hand at horror pulp. Mayhem ensued

ECLIPSE SERIES 37: WHEN HORROR CAME TO SHOCHIKU

The X from Outer Space/Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell/The Living Skeleton/Genocide

Nihonmatsu Kazui/Sato Hajime/Matsuno Hiroshi/
Nihonmatsu Kazui; Japan 1967/68/68/68; Criterion/
Region 1 NTSC DVD; 88/84/80/84 minutes; Aspect
Ratio 2.35:1/2.35:1/2.45:1/2.45:1; Features: essays

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Here, Criterion plunges finally into the irredeemable waters at the dark end of the genre-film septic pool, resurrecting four mid-New Wave Japanese pulp items that had little or no reason to ever be so enshrined. As cinematic history moments go, it's a fairly disreputable one: the then 47-year-old Shochiku studio, well established as the highbrow homebase for Ozu, Mizoguchi and Naruse, simply looked at the international box-office bonanza enjoyed by Toho's *kaiju* monster films (not just *Godzilla*) and decided to try its inexperienced hand at outrageous, cheap, gruesome horror/sci-fi. By all accounts, the experiment proved underwhelming financially, and Shochiku dropped the idea after these four films, evolving in the decades thereafter into a savvy production hub for, among others, Kurosawa Akira, Miike Takashi and Hou Hsiao-hsien.

In the 1960s, Japan had little competition as the world's leading manufacturer of utterly insane 'psychotronics', even from Italy; the lust for wholesale destruction, body horror and inexplicable weirdness, aggregated, could have given you cause to worry for the whole society. It has, in many ways, only gotten more alarming since, as the spiralling obsessions, phobias, desires and traumas stemming from the atomic bomb attacks of 1945 commingled with Japan's traditional neuroses and mutated into the globe's strangest self-regarding pop culture. This uniquely intimate relationship with mutation and mayhem is at the heart of the post-war Japanese genre-film phenomenon, and the Shochiku films are low-down tissue samples of the syndrome.

Nihonmatsu Kazui's *The X from Outer Space* is the most Toho-esque of the lot, a harebrained *kaiju* epic beginning with a rather distracted trip to Mars that brings back UFO-sprayed space spores which grow into a rampaging, quixotically designed rubber-suit monster.

Cheesy, rich in comic non sequiturs and scored with an unpredictable mishmash of 1960s pop and bossa nova, *X* fits comfortably into one's stoned best-bad-movie rental evening, but *Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell* is so rife with queasy oddness that even the most dogged of genre fanatics might be stymied. "I think we're

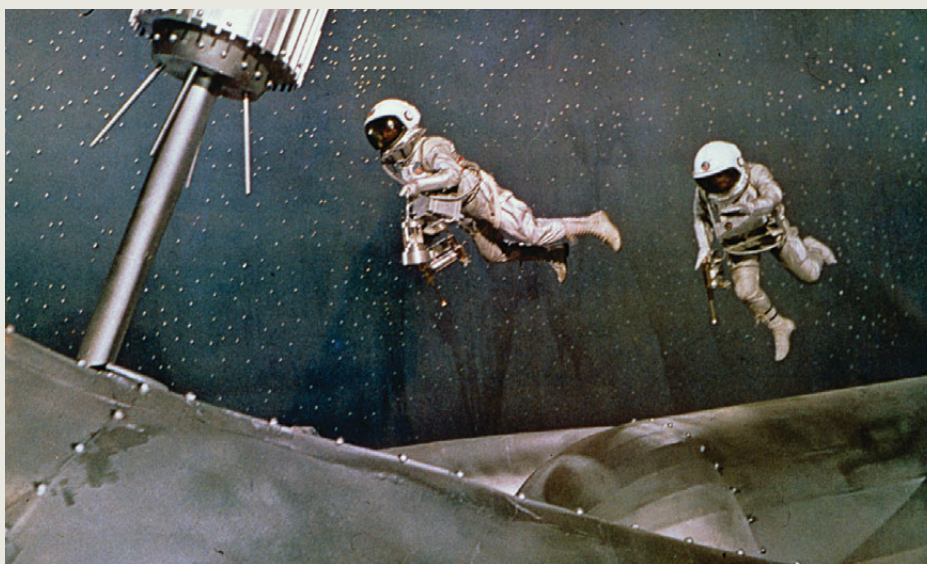


Full throttle: 'Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell'

in for something that will blow our minds," one of the characters says early on, and it's a fair assumption, once an airliner flight is beset by four disasters simultaneously (suicidal birds, an assassin-hijacker, a mysterious bomb threat and a UFO mucking up the instrumentation) and crashes, stranding the hot-headed crew and passengers on a rocky island. Which is where the globular aliens have also decamped, eager to transform one human after another into vampire-demons (by way of opening a vaginal wound in the middle of their faces and crawling inside). Explicitly haunted by Vietnam and conscientiously Rod Serling-esque in shape – particularly once the survivors decide to throw the suicidal bomber out to the vampires, on the grounds that he was looking to die anyway – this psychedelic-hued movie is so erratic and unpredictably messy there's a queasy sense of quite possibly anything happening at any time.

The only classical 'horror' film on the slate, *The Living Skeleton* is an old-fashioned ghost

In the Japanese experience, everything, including the air, was in revolt, bloodthirsty and uncontrollable



Life on Mars: 'The X from Outer Space'

story, shot in inky black-and-white and storied around a past trauma, a haunted ship, a priest with a terrible secret, a bunch of cretinous bad guys getting their phantasmic comeuppance and a beautiful girl and the ghost of her murdered twin (Matsuoka Kikko playing both, mesmerisingly). Owing no small props to Mario Bava, *Skeleton* is director's Matsuno Hiroshi's only film, and is easily the most coherent and 'effective' of the Shochiku wingdings.

Genocide, on the other hand, is an entomophobic accident of a film, beginning with another plane crash – this time caused by a swarm of psychotic bees and involving a troublesome hydrogen bomb – and tripping over crisscrossing subplots (all taking place on an island occupied by US army forces, a crusading entomologist, rogue spies, a deranged pilot and more) before we discover an insect-mutating plot to exact vengeance on Europe, specifically Germany, for the crimes of WWII. Screenwriter Takaku Susumu, who also penned *Goke* (and who was born in Fukushima), obviously had a battery of obsessions, but *Genocide* plays mostly as a national symptom, in a legacy of scenarios devised both to make sense of, and to reduce to pulp, the memories of nuclear heat-death. Aliens, vampires, monsters, bees – the particulates of the struggling catharsis hardly matter, because in the Japanese experience everything, including the air itself, was in revolt, bloodthirsty and uncontrollable.

Coming only with ripping gouts of essay contextualisation by critic Chuck Stephens, the set is typically immaculate, more so than these grungy matinee lurkers deserve, to be honest; for years they could be viewed outside Japan only on worn VHS copies or dubs without subtitles, and that semi-secret vibe suits their amok sensibilities better. Polished and packaged, the movies are now merely pure kitsch. ☹

New releases



MAITRESSE

Barbet Schroeder; France 1976; BFI/Region B

Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 113 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Domestic Masochism' documentary, booklet, theatrical trailers

Reviewed by Kim Newman

As Patricia MacCormack points out in her contributions to the helpful booklet and her contextualising mini-documentary *Domestic Masochism* included with this dual-format release, Barbet Schroeder's *Maitresse* is part of a 1970s cycle of European films that straddle the art-exploitation divide, with social class lurking as a subtext while the surface examines extremes of sexuality and the teetering balance of sadism and masochism.

Aimless semi-thug Olivier (Gérard Depardieu) is dragooned by a more crooked, more ruthless friend into burgling a flat they suppose to be empty, only to discover that it's a literal dungeon, accessed through a hatch in the ceiling and operated by dominatrix Ariane (Bulle Ogier). She responds to the presence of two burly, dangerous men in her fetish world by threatening them with her huge dog and handcuffing them to a radiator while she gets on with her business, then impulsively releasing Olivier and paying him "200 francs for three minutes' work" – urinating on the face of a client during one of her elegant, painful charades. Olivier becomes Ariane's boyfriend and partner but he persistently misreads signals – crossing the rigid boundaries that make her business and her clients' lifestyles workable, threatening to disrupt her carefully maintained world.

Once a censorship hot potato, this is the full version – complete with unfaked nipple-piercing and scrotal nailing – but it's a film that goes out of its way to be objective rather than titillating (as opposed to, say, Just Jaeckin's *Story of O*), with a sense of the surrealism, po-faced absurdity and practical difficulties of S&M play (in one sequence, a wounded, winded Ariane is hampered by her tight corset and impractical fetish heels as she tries to stand up).

Disc: Besides the documentary, which includes input from MacCormack and Schroeder specialist Edward Lamberti, there are trailers for *Maitresse* and the director's *More and The Valley (Obscured by Clouds)*. The booklet includes thoughts on the film from MacCormack and Schroeder, and a rundown of the film's history with the BBFC by Craig Lapper – it was originally rejected outright (though examiners recognised its merit) and seen only in club cinemas, then passed with substantial cuts in 1981 and uncut in 2003.

THE FILMS OF MARCEL PAGNOL

La Gloire de mon père/Le Château de ma mère

Yves Robert; France 1990; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 201 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: 'Pagnol's Glory' and 'Aunt Rose's Story' featurettes

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Part of the French 'heritage cinema' boom of the 1980s and 1990s, this pair of good-natured, glossily sentimental adaptations of Marcel Pagnol's memoirs of his Provençal childhood are the incarnation of 'cultural tourism'.



In deep: 'Southern Comfort'

Sunny in look and outlook, unlike Pagnol's crueller and darker peasant dramas *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*, director Yves Robert's affectionate and idealised portrait of a Belle Epoque childhood is husky with nostalgia for pre-industrial rural France. *La Gloire de mon père* dawdles genially through the gentle drama of Aunt Rose's courtship and Marcel learning to temper his hero-worship of his schoolmaster father (an excellently fussy Philippe Caubère). *Le Château de ma mère*, in which the family's country weekends are blighted when their use of an illicit shortcut threatens to end their idyll, is more nuanced, unlike Pagnol's flawless paragon of a mother (Nathalie Roussel). Their real subject, however, is Marcel's infatuation with Provençal life and landscape, an infatuation which the films share. Cinematographer Robert Alazraki's camera alternately lingers lovingly on the pretty period settings or swoops over the Provençal hills, which are alive to the sound of Vladimir Cosma's lush score.

Discs: Nicely restored, both *Gloire* and *Château* enjoy fine, burnished transfers and a pair of presentable featurettes praising the films' fidelity to their source material.

SICK: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BOB FLANAGAN, SUPERMASOCHIST

Kirby Dick; US 1997; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate

18; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: commentary by Kirby Dick and editor Dody Doran, booklet of essays, short documentaries 'Dick on Sick' and 'Sara's Sick Too', trailers, original soundtrack

Reviewed by David Jenkins

A close-up shot of a penis lying on a slab of timber. A nail enters the frame. The nail is hammered through the tip of the penis. A funny song plays on the soundtrack before the nail is levered out of the wood (and penis) and blood rains down on the lens. This scene was – perhaps unsurprisingly – cut from the original release of Kirby Dick's 1997 documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*, with the BBFC citing the possibility that it would "be highly dangerous if copied". In tandem with the BFI's recent 'Uncut!' season, celebrating banned and censored work, it comes to DVD with all gloriously deviant acts intact. And rightly so, as these moments help *Sick* to bolster its claim for intertextual complicity, in that it's

a film about sadomasochism that is often extraordinarily painful to watch. But there's pleasure too, predominantly from Dick's avuncular subject, a reptilian, lifelong sufferer of cystic fibrosis who signed away his life to live-in lover Sheree Rose. Their alternative relationship, in which Flanagan (who died in 1996) was subjected to various forms of domination, humiliation and playful ad-hoc surgery involving syringes and large metal orbs, soon evolved into an all-encompassing conceptual art project, which Flanagan would talk of in his scandalous one-man stage shows. More than a piece of countercultural reportage à la Nick Broomfield's *Fetishes* (1996), Dick's film employs his subject to probe moving existential concerns and frame the notion of romantic love in a radical new light.

Disc: An accompanying booklet offers a detailed essay by BBFC senior examiner Murray Perkins on the film's battle with the censors, while the disc itself contains an acerbic director's commentary and a short documentary in which Dick recounts his memories of making the picture. Apparently the scene mentioned above led to lots of walk-outs at festival screenings.

SOUTHERN COMFORT

Walter Hill; US 1981; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray;

Certificate 18; 106 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1;

Features: Walter Hill interview

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In 1981 it was too easy to overlook the strengths of Walter Hill's lean, flavourful *Southern Comfort*. Even the poster tagline ("Not since *Deliverance*") seemed to go out of its way to suggest that it was purely derivative of an earlier film, though this particular lost-in-the-wilderness-harried-by-an-implacable-foe scenario is modelled more closely on John Ford's much remade *The Lost Patrol* (1934) than John Boorman's 1972 backwoods horror.

Set during the Vietnam War, when signing up for the National Guard was seen as a relatively safe alternative to the draft, the film follows a unit of the Louisiana Guard on a training exercise in the bayou. Showing the sort of initiative that most films would admire as gung-ho high spirits, the platoon requisition some unattended canoes; when the Cajun owners show up, the most idiotic of the soldiers fires off blank machine-gun rounds at them. The inevitable response is a volley of real bullets, which takes out the only competent professional soldier in the unit (Peter Coyote), leaving the crew of simmering foul-ups at each others' throats even as they struggle with knee-high foul water and an indigenous enemy far more comfortable in the landscape than they are (Ry Cooder's Cajun-Japanese score suggests that the film is on the side of the enemy).

Always an exponent of character revealed through action, Hill makes great use of a disparate cast (Powers Boothe, Keith Carradine and Fred Ward displace the most water but the shorter-lived characters are equally well realised) in showing how the platoon turn viciously on each other when put in a survival situation complicated by the fact that they really have collectively and

New releases

individually asked for punishment. Hill claims he told the cast and crew that he'd fire anyone who said it was an allegory for Vietnam, but this fits into a cycle of bringing-the-war-home movies which includes westerns (*Ulzana's Raid*), horror films (*The Hills Have Eyes*) and deranged veteran dramas (*First Blood*). **Disc:** The Blu-ray transfer highlights the film's distinctive swamp-grey look, which is at once beautiful and uncomfortable.

FILMS BY JACQUES TATI

Jour de fête

France 1949; BFI/Region 2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate U; 70 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: longer 1964 black-and-white version of the film, three short films, booklet, original trailer

Mon Oncle

France 1958; BFI/Region 2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate U; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: English version, booklet, original trailer

Reviewed by David Jenkins

It's interesting that these two Tati titles are being released on Blu-ray at the same time, as you could see them as making up continuing chapters of the same wry sociological saga. *Jour de fête* operates as a rapturous celebration of French provincial life which also toys with the promotion of aggressively streamlined business models and their dire impact on localism and human interaction. *Mon Oncle* revisits the landscape nearly a decade on, at a time when chic modernist architecture casts its imposing rectangular shadow over the cheery archaic values of the village.

Of course, both films are suffused with a fond irony, and Tati is, among other things, a master at locating and accentuating the absurd in the banal rituals of everyday life. Perhaps the key difference between the films is that *Jour de fête* is more open to needling the idiosyncrasies of progress and tradition, whereas *Mon Oncle* comes across at times as being genuinely disdainful of certain types of people and certain shifts in taste.

Mark Cousins observed in his epic television documentary *The Story of Film* that Ingmar Bergman viewed life as a theatre and Fellini viewed it as a circus. To extend the analogy, Tati viewed life as a fairground, where human existence comprises a series of mechanical and fast-moving circular motions that are all set to a jubilant barrel-organ ditty. In that light, *Jour de fête*, which juxtaposes a village fair with the travails of a gangly and impressionable postman (played by Tati) who's been cajoled by the townsfolk to complete his rounds 'American-style', could be chalked up as the director's auteurist statement of intent. *Mon Oncle* refines that blueprint. And yet one feels less inclined to ally the latter film with the work of silent comics like Chaplin or Keaton, but with such imperious studies of urban alienation as Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964) or, more recently, Pedro Costa's *Colossal Youth* (2006).

Discs: Transfer-wise, the *Mon Oncle* disc is exemplary. The clarity of image emphasises the straight lines of the modernist housing unit (designed in collaboration with French painter Jacques Lagrange) with which Tati's



Ceci est une pipe: 'Mon Oncle'

Monsieur Hulot is unable to physically or emotionally connect. The transfer brings out the large swashes of primary colour scattered across the plains of gunmetal grey which, against the mussy browns of the old town, make the film also work as a clever essay contrasting classical and modern painting.

The transfer of *Jour de fête* is an altogether thornier prospect. The film was simultaneously photographed in monochrome and the then experimental process of Thomson-Color which, at the time, could not be correctly developed or printed. The stock gives the colours of *Jour de fête* a gorgeous milky tinge, creating the impression of a faded picture-postcard. This version was eventually released in 1995 and, along with a curious 1964 black-and-white version which contains a quaint English-language voiceover and numerous hand-painted inserts, is contained on the BFI's disc. Some may find the Thomson-Color version occasionally difficult to watch, as there are a few moments (usually scenic establishing shots) where fuzzy vertical bars are clearly visible on the print – though this is an authentic (and frankly entirely fitting) digital representation of the film and its scrappy old world.

THIS IS CINERAMA

Merian C. Cooper; US 1952; Flicker Alley/Region-free Blu-ray and NTSC DVD Dual Format; 127 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.59:1 'Smilebox' (DVD anamorphic); Features: commentary, restoration demonstration, breakdown reel, alternate Act II European opening, Fred Waller radio interview, Cinerama tributes, trailers, stills gallery, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

'This Was Cinerama' might be a more accurate title for this lovingly curated and warmly nostalgic package. Clearly aware of the physical impossibility of reproducing the effect of a full-scale 25-foot-high installation in the home, Flicker Alley has packed its disc and accompanying booklet with assorted scholarly and anecdotal tributes to cinema's first commercially successful widescreen process, the historical predecessor of both CinemaScope and IMAX.

The film itself is surprisingly watchable even when drastically scaled down. Although the introductions by co-producer Lowell Thomas are overextended, plenty of entertainment remains, thanks to the decision to alternate between travelogue, cultural and thrill-ride episodes. Bookended by a trip on New York's Rockaways' Playland rollercoaster and an aerial

voyage over key American landmarks, the film drops in on an Edinburgh tattoo, a La Scala production of *Aida*, a Venetian gondola ride, a bullfight in Spain and the Vienna Boys' Choir performing in their natural habitat. There is also a lengthy stopover at Florida's Cypress Gardens to showcase numerous aquatic stunts.

Unsurprisingly, it's more of a technical than an artistic achievement. The three-panel set-up almost invariably displays a single widescreen picture, only very occasionally indulging in the kind of visual counterpoint that made Abel Gance's similar Polyvision process so compelling at the climax of *Napoléon* 25 years earlier. But the historical fascination is considerable, enhanced by a palpable sense of immersion in the early 1950s. The video version's 'Smilebox' format mimics the original screen's 146-degree curve, emphasising the way that Cinerama was arguably a more convincingly three-dimensional film process than anything achieved with the aid of special glasses, because it sought to capture and convey the entire field of human vision.

Disc: Start with the positives: the multichannel soundtrack is in spectacular shape for a 60-year-old film. As for the picture, a detailed behind-the-scenes featurette owns up to the financial and technical restrictions affecting this release: unable to afford the full photochemical restoration that the original three-strip negatives badly needed, Flicker Alley ended up working from a 70mm reduction of varying quality. Although strategically blurred, the joins between the original panels remain clearly visible, and the quality gap between the Blu-ray and DVD isn't nearly as great as one might hope. That said, the transfer still conveys a vivid impression of what Cinerama was like, and it's hard to think of any significant contextual stones left unturned by the wide-ranging extras.

A TRIP TO THE MOON

Georges Méliès; France 1902; Park Circus/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 16 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: 'The Extraordinary Voyage' documentary

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

The restored version of the colour print of Méliès's early masterwork is presented here with music by French band Air. The effect is vivid, funny and very odd. From the opening scenes of wizards debating the practicalities of air travel to the famous moment when the rocket plops down on a very viscous lunar surface, the iridescent imagery is startling. This may be sci-fi but it comes with plenty of vaudeville-style slapstick and sexual innuendo thrown in. For some reason, the protagonists have fake wigs and beards – they're more Mr Pooter than Neil Armstrong – and the rocket itself is pushed into place by a bevy of bathing beauties. The Air music adds a layer of lyricism and wonder to a film that is so bizarre and hard to categorise that it doesn't seem dated in the slightest.

Disc: Martin Scorsese is among those thanked in the credits. His own *Hugo* (2011) has reawakened interest in Méliès, whose life is celebrated here in the documentary *The Extraordinary Voyage*.

THE HUMAN JUNGLE

Independent Artists/ABC/ITV; UK 1963-65; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 1,317 minutes; Certificate PG; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: viewing notes

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Herbert Lom, who died in September, often excelled at portraying men in need of psychiatric care, whether sinister foreigners or the comic foil in the *Pink Panther* sequels. He was at his considerable best on the other side of the couch too, as in Compton Bennett's *The Seventh Veil* (1945) and David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* (1983). His charm and good humour are well in evidence in *The Human Jungle*, a glossy hit that ran on British television for two years in the 1960s. He stars as a Harley Street doctor bringing up a teenage daughter (the diminutive Sally Smith, often uncomfortably shoehorned into the plots), dividing his time between running a psychiatric unit in a hospital and his personal practice.

If Lom's fan mail was to be believed, the answer to Freud's eternal question – what does a woman want? – was definitely an understanding psychiatrist. As a result the show – acknowledging perhaps that for all his charisma the protagonist was by necessity often too passive a figure – amped up the female guest-star quota. There were appearances from Joan Collins, as a stripper with father issues (the episode has one of the show's best cold opens, in which she rhythmically disrobes before attempting to jump in front of a London Underground train); Margaret Lockwood as a suicidal actress; Rita Tushingham as a dog lover who really wants a baby; and perhaps most deliriously of all, Flora Robson as a headmistress whose insomnia has roots in a pathological tale of blackmail with a daring hint of lesbianism. Despite the highfalutin-sounding title, the stories are often ingenious (if frequently absurd) melodramas told with plenty of vim, only occasionally surrendering to the ludicrous in the hasty race to a pat resolution.

Discs: The image transfer renders the moody black-and-white cinematography superbly. The detailed booklet by TV historian Andrew Pixley is highly recommended.

MAISON CLOSE – SERIES 1

Noé Productions/Canal+/Jimmy; France 2011; Arrow/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 423 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

This pugnacious sex-trade drama plays like the bastard child of Baz Luhrmann and Tinto Brass, the vigorous but decorous porn-chic shagging shot with MTV dynamism and anachronistically backed by a modern rock soundtrack. Set immediately after the suppression of the Paris commune in and around a busy upper-crust bordello, it opens with an old general's climax, after which he tells his bed companion Véra (Anne Charrier) that she was so passionate he almost believed it. She is giving what she thinks is her farewell performance, since a rich baron is settling her debt with Hortense (a permanently seething Valérie Karsenti), the madam running the establishment (and Véra's lover). But Hortense refuses to give Véra up and has the baron



Maison Close Shot with MTV dynamism, this pugnacious sex-trade drama plays like the bastard child of Baz Luhrmann and Tinto Brass

killed. Meanwhile young country girl Rose (Jemima West) arrives looking for her mother but instead is trapped inside the brothel, her virginity sold off to the highest bidder.

This eight-part serial is certainly bracing, emphasising the brutality of the times through extreme violence – including stabbings, rape and a face being burned off in an acid attack – and language ferocious enough to make Tony Montana blush. The result is an utterly absorbing tale of revenge and self-determination in the face of a pitiless and crushing patriarchal culture, with survival rather than redemption the only viable goal.

Disc: There are no extras.

PARADE'S END

Mammoth Screen/HBO/BBC; UK 2012; BBC Worldwide/Region B Blu-ray; 336 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: behind-the-scenes documentary

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Graham Greene stirred up a hornets' nest among the literati when he omitted the final volume of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy when preparing the Bodley Head edition. That edition offered a prismatic view of previous events, and there is a hint of this approach in Tom Stoppard's energetic adaptation, which jettisons much of the last volume's narrative but retains

most of Ford's important bits and the vast cast of characters, while also injecting some of the playwright's trademark verbal pyrotechnics (Rufus Sewell's barmy vicar is told that "the parish magazine is not self-evidently the appropriate platform from which to condemn restrictive female undergarments as being a danger to the sexual health of our women").

Benedict Cumberbatch, apparently attempting to corner the market in small-screen depictions of brainy but emotionally reticent men, brings an occasional air of surreptitious humour to his playing of Christopher Tietjens, caught in a love triangle between innocent suffragette Valentine and his fiery and capricious wife Sylvia (a showstopping performance by Rebecca Hall). The five hours of allocated screen time only really seem inadequate in the rushed finale, though Sylvia's unlikely visit to the Front during the Great War is overlong. Otherwise this is a fine evocation of the end of the Edwardian era, one that is often magical and touching and has considerably more bite and wit than comparable TV reductions of Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* or Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.

Disc: The image transfer and 5.1 audio are near perfect in HD. The only extra is a dull if perfectly adequate 50-minute 'making of'.



Golden days: 'The Lavender Hill Mob', one of Ealing's signature comedies

BEYOND THE JOKES

EALING REVISITED

Edited by Mark Duguid, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston, Melanie Williams, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 293pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781844575107

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

It's well over half a century since Michael Balcon led his depleted troops out of the modest-sized 'studio on the village green' to live out their brief, dispiriting coda in a corner of the MGM lot at Borehamwood. Yet the identity of Ealing during the Balcon era remains vivid in the public consciousness, having established itself in a way that far larger and more prolific British studios have never managed to do. Mention 'a Pinewood film' or 'a Shepperton film' and no particular association is conjured up. But 'an Ealing film': yes, that still resonates, even if, as several of the contributors to this book point out, the iconic image it generally suggests is a lot more restricted in scope and tone than the studio's actual output deserves.

Paying due tribute to Charles Barr's landmark

study *Ealing Studios* (1977, third edition 1999), the 21 contributors – including Barr himself – set out to explore areas of Ealing's Balcon-era production that remain overshadowed by the 'cosy comedy' tag that stubbornly adheres to the studio's name. Robert Murphy, in his chapter 'Dark Shadows Around Ealing', questions Barr's statement that after Robert Hamer's 'Haunted Mirror' episode of *Dead of Night* (1945), "Ealing does not enter this dark world again." There's darkness aplenty, Murphy notes, even in the films of Michael Relph and Basil Dearden, often written off as the tamest and most conventional members of the Ealing team, and he cites *Frieda* (1947), *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (1948), *Cage of Gold* (1950), *Pool of London* (1950) and *The Ship That Died of Shame* (1955) as evidence. He even, controversially, ranks Charles Crichton's MGM-period *Man*

Many aspects of Ealing's output remain overshadowed by the 'cosy comedy' tag that stubbornly adheres to its name

in the Sky (1956) as "among Ealing's finest".

Certain aspects of Ealing's output aren't so much neglected as almost totally unknown. In their chapter 'From Tinsel to Realism and Back Again', Mark Duguid and Katy McGahan explore the 30-odd documentary shorts produced by the studio from 1939 to 1945. Some of them are currently missing or inaccessible and few of those that survive, as the authors concede, have "any great distinction". Nonetheless, they provided a conduit through which the documentary influence, in the person of Alberto Cavalcanti, appointed head of the Ealing Shorts Unit in 1940, entered the Ealing bloodstream. His arrival, followed by that of some of his colleagues from the former GPO Film Unit (most notably Harry Watt), led to such classic wartime propaganda features as *The Next of Kin* (1942), *Went the Day Well?* (1942, directed by Cavalcanti himself), *Nine Men* (1943), *The Bells Go Down* (1943) and *San Demetrio, London* (1943).

Other chapters foreground elements in Ealing movies that don't normally attract much attention, such as scoring and costumes. It's especially good to see Anthony Mendleson,



Lee's diverse yet auteurist work raises probing questions without offering pat answers

SPIKE LEE'S AMERICA

By David Sterritt, Polity Press, 264pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780745651828

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Illustrating the cyclical nature of the film industry, Spike Lee has followed a barren spell of four years with a flurry of activity. This year alone, the New Yorker has released a new feature (*Red Hook Summer*) and a well-received documentary about the 25th anniversary of Michael Jackson's *Bad*, started work on a remake of Park Chanwook's thriller *Old Boy* and directed a one-man Broadway play starring Mike Tyson. Firmly back in the spotlight, Lee now finds himself the subject of David Sterritt's *Spike Lee's America*, the latest in a series that examines how American society has been filtered through the lenses of high-profile US filmmakers (previous entries concerned Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg). Arguing that Lee's diverse yet auteurist output exhibits a continuing willingness to raise probing questions that confront contemporary America without offering pat answers, Sterritt provides a brief biographical overview of Lee, then works through his work chronologically, from the 1983 NYU thesis film *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* to 2008's ill-fated *Miracle at St. Anna*.

The book cleaves to a fairly straightforward formula – plot synopsis followed by brief textual and thematic analysis, largely framed around quoted observations from other scholars and critics – and is at its strongest in its opening passages, where Sterritt's passion for Lee's output is palpable. A thoughtful, multivalent discussion of his 1989 breakthrough *Do the Right Thing* articulately locates the film within the tinderbox socio-political climate of New York at the time of its release. His take on much-maligned campus musical

School Daze (1988), meanwhile, offers a salient discussion on the issue of colourism within the African-American community. Sterritt's overarching suggestion that Lee's films exhibit a model of sophisticated dialectical thinking comes as a refreshing rebuttal to the frequent criticism that they are messy and unfocused.

Sadly, the author's interest in his subject seems to wane over the course of the book; he sprints through the most recent 16 years of Lee's career in less than half the space dedicated to the first ten. This results in a huge void where an appreciation of recent changes in the industry regarding distribution, exhibition and social media – and Lee's relation to them – should be. Intriguing misfires like *Girl 6* (1996) and *She Hate Me* (2004) – surely ripe test cases for Sterritt to probe Lee's engagement with contemporary pop-cultural representation – are swatted aside ("I see no reason to linger on this film").

Another misstep, especially given the context the book's title explicitly sets out, is to blithely dismiss Lee's documentary work as "a generally unimaginative lot". After all, 2006's operatic response to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, together with its epic follow-up *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, surely constitute Lee's most salient filmic statement about contemporary America since *Do the Right Thing*. Elsewhere, however, Sterritt seems hemmed in by the book's brief, frequently recouring to trite oversimplifications that read as anodyne attempts to connect the material back to the title. As talented as Lee is, can his – or anyone's – portrayal of America really be described as "authentic and true"?

Ultimately, *Spike Lee's America* winds up feeling more like a routine exercise than an impassioned critique of one of the more vibrant filmmakers of the last 30 years. That said, it's perfectly readable, mercifully free of clichéd characterisations of the director as an "angry black man" – and informative enough to recommend as a reference tool for Spike beginners. ⑤

the studio's infinitely resourceful head of wardrobe from 1947 to 1956, getting his due. Catherine A. Surowiec celebrates his skill in designing the "clothing rooted in everyday life" that the majority of Ealing movies called for, while still seizing the occasional opportunity (as in *Saraband* or *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, 1949) to display his "elegant wit and flair for fantasy". And in his chapter entitled 'Ealing's French Dressing' Geoff Brown hails the contribution made to such seemingly quintessentially English comedies as *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) and *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) by the unexpected figure of Georges Auric, a member of the sparkling group of French composers known as Les Six that included Poulenc and Milhaud.

The book is generously supplied with judiciously chosen black-and-white stills and photos (though one from 1939's *There Ain't No Justice* is miscaptioned: that ain't Jimmy Hanley). And 16 pages of colour illustrations in the middle, largely given over to the studio's superb publicity posters, act as tribute to Ealing's famously gregarious head of publicity Monja Danischewsky and his head of advertising S. John Woods for their enlightened policy of commissioning some of the leading artists of the day, including Edward Ardizzone, John Piper, Barnett Freedman and Edward Bawden, to design the posters and publicity material – a policy often deplored as 'uncommercial' by Ealing's hard-headed paymasters in the Rank Organisation.

A drawback of multi-authored volumes like this one isn't so much unevenness – in this case the standard of writing is uniformly high – as that, since each writer has his or her particular patch to hoe, a few promising areas may remain untitled. *They Came to a City* (1944), that startlingly outspoken slice of pure socialist propaganda, gets something of its due in Lee Freeman's chapter 'Mild Revolution?' but two other films equally outside what's generally seen as the Ealing mainstream are largely passed over. Thorold Dickinson's *Secret People* (1951) never quite lives up to its ambitions, but it's Ealing's only shot at a serious political thriller, and is also of note for having had its production tracked in detail by Lindsay Anderson in his book *Making a Film*. But it rates only a couple of throwaway sentences in the editors' introduction.

Almost equally overlooked is that most anomalous of Ealing's war movies, *Against the Wind* (1948). Melanie Williams, in her chapter on Ealing's women, 'A Feminine Touch?', considers it purely for its casting of Simone Signoret as a strong, decisive female figure. True enough, but what's more interesting about the film is its disenchanted, almost contemptuous attitude towards British wartime heroics. Inevitably, it flopped; three years after the war, the public was nowhere near ready for such a downbeat view of the conflict. Still, these omissions just go to show that there's still plenty of scope for further visits to Britain's most fondly remembered studio. ⑤



Inside the tinderbox: John Turturro, left, and Spike Lee in 'Do the Right Thing'

PERFORMANCE:

A Biography of the Classic Sixties Film

By Paul Buck, Omnibus Press, 320pp, £19.95, ISBN 9780857127914

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

With several volumes already dedicated to *Performance* and its auteur Donald Cammell, one might be forgiven for wondering what there could possibly be left to say on the subject. Although Paul Buck's *Performance: A Biography of the Classic Sixties Film* analyses the film in exhaustive detail, this book's real achievement lies in its awareness that *Performance* is one of those works that refuses to sit still for its portrait. Buck comes closer than anyone else to catching the film's elusive quality – the sense that it is experience as much as text – by treating it as the centre of a web stretching out in numerous directions. What might in another context read like trivial or gossipy digressions – on the gangland connections of Cammell's onscreen 'performers', the director's art-world background, the Rolling Stones' various girlfriends and the circumstances of the film's production (notably the role played in this study of confused identities by credited co-director/cinematographer Nicolas Roeg, who was long assumed to be its primary creator) – here illuminate areas that would inevitably have been missed by more traditional methods.

Buck even brings his own history into this complex mesh (he came close to writing the official novelisation back in 1969) and his longstanding interest in the film pays remarkable dividends: surely only someone who had lived obsessively with *Performance* for much of his life could have discovered that the name of Mick Jagger's character, Turner, most likely originated in a garbled reference to Jacobean dramatist Cyril Tourneur as 'Cyril Turner' in an English translation of Artaud's essay on Van Gogh that Cammell was familiar with.

One is tempted to describe this book as the last word on its subject, but Buck's point is that *Performance* is one of those labyrinths without a centre (to quote Borges's description of *Citizen Kane*) whose nature is to be continually spinning away from a sense of closure. Suffice it to say that Buck is among the most reliable guides to this particular labyrinth – and that his book will provide even the most slavish devotee with new tools to better comprehend this inexhaustible masterpiece. ☺



A film that refuses to sit still: 'Performance'

COLOUR FILMS IN BRITAIN:

The Negotiation of Innovation 1900-1955

By Sarah Street, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 320pp, £26, ISBN 9781844573127

Reviewed by Ian Christie

"Will the colour film altogether supplant the black-and-white film?" This question, posed in 1951 by a colour enthusiast and quoted in a pivotal chapter on "debating colour" in Sarah Street's survey, yields an unexpected answer: "It will still be surprising if one-half of all films made are made in colour in the year 2000." Adrian Klein had been experimenting with "colour music" from as early as 1913, as part of the great international wave of interest in combining colour and abstract moving images that included the painters Wassily Kandinsky and Léopold Survage and composers Alexander Scriabin and Arnold Schönberg, and would lead to pioneering films by Walter Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger and the now-celebrated Len Lye abstract films of the 1930s. Here, however, Klein appears in his 'technical expert' role, rather than as a colour visionary, and his cautious prediction is based partly on the high cost of colour processes but also, intriguingly, on his diagnosis of "a national liking for the rather sad tones of the British sentiment for colour".

Did the British really not like strong or vivid colour, even after what we have come to think of as the Technicolor triumphs of the mid-1940s? The central chapters of Street's useful chronicle give due weight to the great series of films that ran from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) to *The Red Shoes* (1948), of which four were by Powell and Pressburger and two by David Lean (*This Happy Breed* and *Blithe Spirit*), plus the contrasting wartime pair of Pat Jackson's documentary *Western Approaches* and Olivier's elaborately theatrical *Henry V* (both 1944), making up what might be considered the British 'Technicolor canon'. There is some evidence that these were seen as a distinctive achievement, especially from the vantage point of Hollywood, where *Black Narcissus* won the Academy Award for 1947, and there was enthusiastic technical coverage in *American Cinematographer*. But there is no clear answer to speculation that Technicolor's process may have produced chemically different results in Britain due to different water quality.

What does become clear, however, is that Jack Cardiff, the acknowledged hero of British Technicolor, was not alone in thinking hard about what was now possible. Street reveals the designer Alfred Junge's careful approach to designing *Blimp*, his first colour film: he felt he had to "tempt the camera to make more of my colour scheme than the actual scheme itself did" – not the kind of language we're used to associating with the disciplinarian Junge. Street has discovered that *Blimp* briefly 'quotes' a 1941 textiles documentary,

As late as 1951, experts thought "it will still be surprising if one-half of all films made are made in colour in the year 2000"



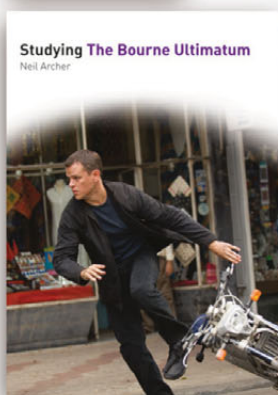
Early British colour: 'Wings of the Morning'

Queen Cotton, and intriguingly refers to evidence she found in the papers of Natalie Kalmus, often cast as the tasteless guardian of Technicolor gaudiness, that Kalmus may have contributed a "colour synopsis" for this remarkable production, which we're starting to see afresh since its latest restoration.

Admiration for the Archers' colour films, including their later post-Rank work *Gone to Earth* and *The Tales of Hoffmann* (although rarely *The Elusive Pimpernel*, also unmentioned by Street), is hardly unusual today. In terms of the book's ambition, what's more valuable is its enthusiastic discussion of a much wider range of colour films. The earliest of these is J. Stuart Blackton's *The Glorious Adventure* (1922), shot in Prizmacolor, a short-lived 'subtractive' process that used double-coated filmstock, which featured the society beauty Lady Diana Manners in a tale woven around the 1666 Great Fire of London. Although the Sheffield-born Blackton, a pioneering animator who had also launched Vitagraph in New York, worked hard to promote his spectacular production, claiming that Britain had an historic affinity with colour, this may have been an early casualty of Klein's view about the national taste. Despite being restored years ago by the National Film Archive, like many other non-canonic colour films, it remains virtually unknown.

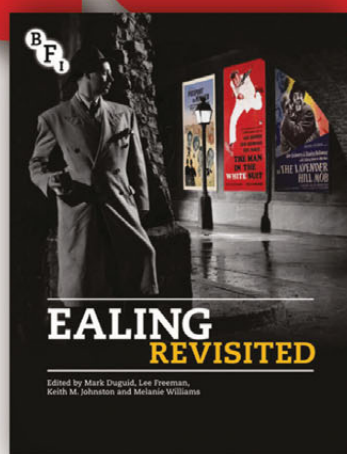
After a sympathetic discussion of Smith and Urban's Kinemacolor process, briefly triumphant in 1910-14, and an exploration of the varied qualities of Dufaycolor and Gasparcolor (used by Lye), Street makes the case for a fresh look at Claude Friese-Greene's 1925 *The Open Road* series (now on DVD), as well as *Wings of the Morning* (1936), *The Mikado* (1939) and *The Great Mr. Handel* (1942); and, in the post-war period, *London Town* (1946) and *Blanche Fury* (1947). In addition, there are many more animated and live-action shorts, temptingly illustrated throughout this handsomely produced book, underlining the fact that colour first reached British audiences in 'supporting' elements of the cinema programme before it began to be used widely for features. In one of the few sources of audience feedback we have, from a 1943 Mass Observation questionnaire, many respondents mention Disney – the first studio to adopt Technicolor for all its output – and always enthusiastically, while among the generally welcoming remarks on *Blimp*, one approved "in spite of Technicolor". Klein's prediction may have proved wrong, but he seems to have understood the national aesthetic. ☺

Read



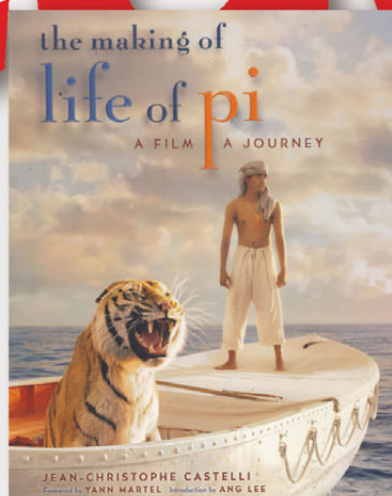
STUDYING THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM

By Neil Archer, Auteur, 144pp, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733599
In 2010 *Sight & Sound* included *The Bourne Ultimatum* in its poll of the most important films of the noughties. What is it about this third entry in a Hollywood action franchise that satisfied both critics and audiences? *Studying The Bourne Ultimatum* considers the film's serious blockbuster credentials; compares the rise of Bourne to James Bond; analyses how the dynamics of the action thriller are used to depict covert operations of US intelligence; looks closely at the action sequences, focusing on their style and innovation; and considers the film's questioning of responsibility and culpability.
www.auteur.co.uk



EALING REVISITED

Edited by Mark Duguid, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams, BFI Publishing/ Palgrave Macmillan, 304pp, paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781844575107
Published to coincide with the BFI's major retrospective, *Ealing Revisited* offers a fresh perspective on the films and history of this much-loved film studio, best known as the producer of classic film comedies such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and *The Ladykillers* (1955). Bringing together leading experts on Ealing and British cinema, this beautifully illustrated book explores the history of Ealing Studios, presents a closer look at its films and their unsung creators, and considers Ealing's lasting impact on British cinema and society.
www.palgrave.com/bfi



THE MAKING OF LIFE OF PI

A Film, a Journey
By Jean-Christophe Castelli, Titan Books, 160pp, hardback, illustrated, £24.99, ISBN 9781781166383
This graphically compelling, diversely illustrated volume is a behind-the-scenes look at Academy Award-winning director Ang Lee's most ambitious film to date, *Life of Pi*, an adaptation of Yann Martel's international bestseller and Man Booker Prize-winning novel. The book includes a foreword by Martel and an introduction by Lee. This 3D film is released on 21 December 2012.
www.titanbooks.com



MAMMA MIA! THE MOVIE

Exploring a Cultural Phenomenon
Edited by Louise FitzGerald and Melanie Williams, I.B. Tauris, 264pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781848859425
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DAYS OF BEING WILD



Tony Leung's enigmatic cameo at the very end of Wong Kar-Wai's second film marks a turning-point in the director's career

By David Evans

A man sits on a bed in a cramped, underlit apartment, buffing his nails. Dressed in waistcoat and tie, a cigarette dangling from his lip, he cuts a handsome, slightly rakish figure. After a few moments he rises, lifts a jacket from a hanger in the corner of the room, puts it on. Crossing to a desk, he collects various items: two packets of cigarettes, a deck of cards, a large wad of cash. He carefully folds a handkerchief and tucks it into his breast pocket. Finally he combs his hair, checks his watch, turns off the light and leaves the room.

So ends Wong Kar-Wai's gorgeous second film *Days of Being Wild* (*Ahfeì Zhenjuang*, 1990). Consisting of a single shot, and backed by the languorous cha-cha of Xavier Cugat's 'Jungle Drums', this closing sequence is utterly compelling – and not a little confusing. The well-dressed man, played by Tony Leung, has not previously been introduced in the film, and his identity is obscure.

Set largely in Hong Kong in the 1960s, *Days of Being Wild* follows Yuddy (Leslie Cheung), an 'Ahfeì', or James Dean-style rebel. Yuddy spends his nights listlessly wandering the city, breaking the hearts of his lovers and the bones of his enemies. He was raised in an adoptive home, and much of his ennui seems to stem from the absence of his biological mother. Towards the end of the film he tracks her down to a palatial estate in the Philippines, only to be sent away,

and this rejection prompts a self-destructive bout of drinking and violence. After Yuddy's death, Wong ties up a few narrative loose ends before unveiling Leung's curious cameo.

As Stephen Teo writes in his excellent book on Wong for the BFI's World Directors series, the ending was originally intended as a sort of teaser trailer for a mooted sequel, which was to centre on Leung's character. But that project fell through, and thus *Days of Being Wild* concludes with the vestigial trace of a film that was never made. As it stands, it makes for an ambiguous denouement. It might be seen to open out and generalise the main narrative, by suggesting that Yuddy is not the only brilliant bad boy sauntering around 1960s Hong Kong. But the scene is also sealed off from the rest of the film, a self-enclosed unit like the garret Leung inhabits, and in that sense it anticipates the fragmented, episodic storytelling that was to characterise Wong's later work.

Another way of looking at it is simply as a showcase for one of the great performers in world cinema. As Robert Towne has put it, a fine screen actor is "ruthlessly efficient" and will "convey a staggering amount of information before he ever opens his mouth". Here Leung somehow manages to conjure an entire character out of a few precise and silent movements: the sureness with which he handles the deck of cards suggests an experienced gambler; the poise with which he

Thanks to Leung's performance, a scene that might have been little more than an incongruous coda becomes resonant

slicks back his hair points to a preoccupation with the era's matinee idols (there are shades of Alain Delon). One even detects some menace in this all too fastidious primping – a hint of concealed violence beneath the groomed surface. Thanks to Leung's performance, a scene that might have been little more than an incongruous coda becomes an exquisite and resonant vignette, and arguably the highlight of the whole film. Rarely has an actor done so much with so little.

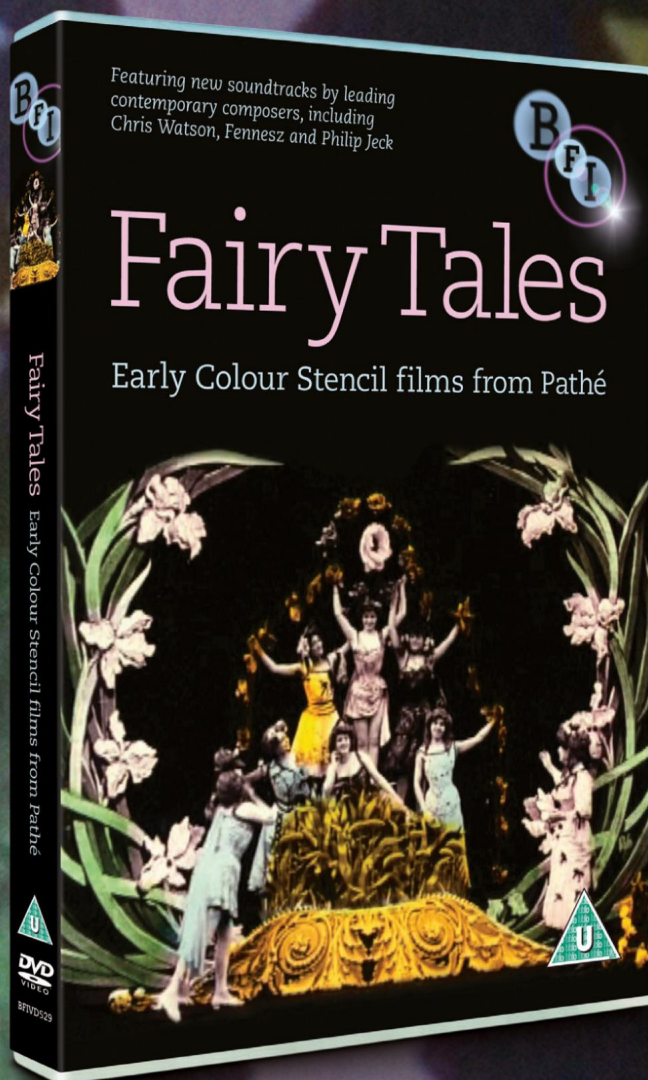
Like most of the big Hong Kong stars of his generation, Leung has made his fair share of commercial dross – as if *Tokyo Raiders* (2000) wasn't bad enough, he went back for the sequel *Seoul Raiders* (2005) too. But his talent has been teased out by the likes of Tran Anh Hung in *Cyclo* (1995) and Hou Hsiao-Hsien in both *A City of Sadness* (1989) and *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998). As the sadistic quisling in Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007), Leung is quite breathtakingly good.

But most of the actor's finest moments have come in tandem with Wong, and *Days of Being Wild* was the first product of an actor-director collaboration that has yielded five further films (the forthcoming Yip Man biopic *The Grandmasters* will be their seventh together), of which at least three are masterpieces. Both the sprightly diptych *Chungking Express* (1994) and the downbeat romance *Happy Together* (1997) are unimaginable without Leung's gentle, melancholic charm, and few other actors could have matched as he did Maggie Cheung's beautifully subtle performance in *In the Mood for Love* (2000).

In hindsight, then, perhaps we should view that mysterious scene in *Days of Being Wild* not as an ending, but as a glorious beginning. 🍷



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